

'A State Undone': Militarization, Systemic Violence, and Egypt's Brutal, but Vulnerable, New Order

Hagar Abdalbar

Review of: Maged Mandour, *Egypt under El-Sisi: A Nation on the Edge* (I.B. Tauris, 2024), 224 pp. (hardcover). USD 27.00. ISBN: 978-0-7556-4913-6

In *Egypt under El-Sisi: A Nation on the Edge*, Egyptian political analyst Maged Mandour offers the first comprehensive analysis of the current Egyptian regime led by General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi who took power after the coup d'état of 3 July 2013. While many scholars have written about the January 2011 revolution — whether chronicling its events or analyzing its causes, dynamics, outcomes, major players, and eventual suppression by the coup,¹ those who focused on the post-coup era have tended to study specific aspects of the regime and/or draw comparisons to its predecessors.² Mandour, in contrast, takes

1 See, for example, Hazem Kandil, *Soldiers, Spies, and Statesmen: Egypt's Road to Revolt* (Verso Books, 2012); *The Journey to Tahrir: Revolution, Protest, and Social Change in Egypt*, ed. by Jeannie Sowers and Chris Toensing (Verso Books, 2012); Asef Bayat, *Revolution without Revolutionaries: Making Sense of the Arab Spring* (Stanford University Press, 2017); Robert Springborg, *Egypt* (Polity Press, 2017); David D. Kirkpatrick, *Into the Hands of the Soldiers: Freedom and Chaos in Egypt and the Middle East* (Viking Press, 2018); Walter Armbrust, *Martyrs and Tricksters: An Ethnography of the Egyptian Revolution* (Princeton University Press, 2019); Joshua Stacher, *Watermelon Democracy: Egypt's Turbulent Transition* (Syracuse University Press, 2020); Mona El-Ghobashy, *Bread and Freedom Egypt's Revolutionary Situation* (Stanford University Press, 2021); Azmi Bishara, *Egypt: Revolution, Failed Transition and Counter-Revolution* (I.B. Tauris, 2022); Jannis Julien Grimm, *Contested Legitimacies Repression and Revolt in Post-Revolutionary Egypt* (Amsterdam University Press, 2022); Hugh Roberts, *Loved Egyptian Night: The Meaning of the Arab Spring* (Verso Books, 2024); and Atef Shahat Said, *Revolution Squared: Tahrir, Political Possibilities, and Counterrevolution in Egypt* (Duke University Press, 2024).

2 See, for example, Maher Hamoud, *The Political Economy of Egyptian Media: Business and Military Elite Power and Communication after 2011* (I.B. Tauris, 2023) which examines the military regime's control and monopoly over the media after the revolution; Robert Springborg, 'Educational Policy in Sisi's Egypt', in *The Political Economy of Education in the Arab World*, ed. by Hicham Alaoui and Robert Springborg (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2021), pp. 87-102; Kira Jumet, 'Authoritarian Repression under Sisi: New Tactics or New Tools?', in *New Authoritarian Practices in the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. by Özgün E. Topak, Merouan Mekouar, and Francesco Cavatorta (Edinburgh University Press, 2022), pp. 73-91 which focuses on the regime's authoritarianism and repression, arguing that the regime's tactics and tools are 'intensified versions of those employed by previous Egyptian presidents' (p. 74); and Sofian Philip Naceur, 'El-Sisi's "New Republic": How the real estate frenzy in Egypt sustains the regime's grip on power', *Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung: North Africa Office, Research Paper Series 4* (2022), pp.

a holistic approach, studying the regime as a whole by examining its ideological foundations, political and legal structures, and economic policies. He argues that, while this regime revives, combines, and intensifies several elements from various previous regimes, it is not a continuation or restoration of any particular past model. Instead, he asserts that it represents a rupture or a radical break with the past, thus marking a new phenomenon. Furthermore, Mandour challenges the predominant view in existing scholarship, which posits that 'Egypt's Revolutionary Situation' led to no 'Revolutionary outcomes' (p. 2), since the 2013 coup d'état ended the country's short-lived democratic period and brought the military back to power. Mandour argues that because the post-coup regime enacted major top-down changes, there were indeed revolutionary outcomes. He explains that this regime is a direct military rule and that it has instituted sweeping structural changes in the country's legal, economic, and political systems. This entrenched militarization of the state apparatus, according to Mandour, sets the current regime apart from its predecessors. However, he contends, the regime's tight control and rigid consolidation of power render it vulnerable as its inflexibility leaves it ill-equipped to absorb shocks and deal with crises.

The book consists of an introduction followed by five chapters, each of which examines a distinct aspect of the regime: its ideology, legal and constitutional framework, mechanisms and infrastructure of repression, and economic model. Mandour concludes with his predictions for the regime's future. Although the book does not make a theoretical intervention, its extensive documentation and rich compilation of sources — including news coverage, reports, studies, and statistics — make it a valuable resource for future scholarship. In addition to its value for academics, the book is written for a broad audience; it is thus accessible to both general readers and specialists interested in contemporary Egyptian history and politics.

In his introduction, Mandour outlines the theoretical framework of the book and provides a historical overview of the establishment and role of the military in modern Egypt. Given the book's empirical focus, its theoretical framework is not extensive. Rather than engaging

4-33 <<https://rosaluxna.org/publications/al-sisis-new-republic-how-the-real-estate-frenzy-in-egypt-sustains-the-regimes-grip-on-power/>> [accessed 28 November 2024] which draws comparisons between the Sisi regime and several previous regimes going as far back as that of Khedive Ismail, particularly regarding mega infrastructure projects, the political motivations behind them, and their economic consequences.

with theoretical perspectives pertaining to the history of modern Egypt and studies of (military) authoritarianism in the Middle East and North Africa in general and in Egypt in specific, Mandour works with Antonio Gramsci's concept of the Passive Revolution and Samuel Finer's 2002 study on the typology of military regimes and the role of the military in politics.

While Mandour acknowledges that the Egyptian context is significantly different from Gramsci's Italian one, he emphasizes the analytical utility of Gramsci's concept in explaining the process of affecting radical top-down change. Mandour explains how the concept of the Passive Revolution, which, as Gramsci theorized it, occurs in non-hegemonic societies where ruling elites govern without the consent and support of the subaltern classes and establish alliances with non-ruling elites to solidify their power, must be substantially adapted to account for three marked differences in the Egyptian context. First, he notes that the military in Egypt rules alone, without alliances with civilian elites. Second, the relationship between the military and the people is quite complex, as the regime uses 'limited and guided popular mobilization to serve [its] political goals', while simultaneously brutally suppressing 'popular participation in policy formulation [and] public debate', ensuring that power remains concentrated in the hands of the military and does not 'diffuse to the popular base of the regime' (pp. 3-4). Third, Mandour states that the post-coup regime is difficult to categorize as strictly hegemonic or non-hegemonic, acknowledging that convincing arguments could be made for both. While he briefly presents the case for each, he does not engage deeply in this debate, stating that 'even if the regime is hegemonic, this does not translate into popular participation in policy formulation or an opening of the public space' (p. 4). Ultimately, he argues that the Passive Revolution framework remains applicable because the 2013 coup d'état led to extensive elite-driven structural changes enacted without popular participation.

The second pillar of the book's theoretical framework is Samuel Finer's *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics*, which Mandour engages with extensively, using Finer's taxonomy of the different forms of military regimes as the foundation of his argument that the Sisi regime is distinct from previous Egyptian regimes.³ Mandour explains that according to Finer, there are three forms of military rule: indirect (which could be limited or complete), dual (where the military

3 Samuel Finer, *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics* (Routledge, 2002).

governs in coalition with civilian partners), and direct ('which can also be 'quasi-civilianized') (p. 6).

In the remaining part of the Introduction, Mandour provides a historical overview of the relationship between the military and the state in Egypt. He shows how the history of the modern Egyptian state is 'deeply intertwined' with the establishment of the modern Egyptian military (p. 7). Mandour focuses especially on the military regimes under Presidents Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak, categorizing them according to Finer's typology. Mandour contends that Nasser initially led a quasi-civilianized direct military rule until the 1967 defeat, which enabled him to finally subdue the military and end its rivalry with the presidency. After that, a trend of dual military-civilian rule ensued, which Sadat and Mubarak then maintained and further developed. Implementing a 'coup-proofing strategy' that aims to 'pre-empt the rise of other possible contenders' from the military (pp. 12-13), Sadat and especially Mubarak consolidated this trajectory of dual military-civilian rule by allowing the expansion of the military's economic activities and presence in businesses, state bureaucracy, and intelligence services — which amassed the military huge wealth, drawing them into a 'web of cronyism' and ensuring their loyalty to the president from whom they benefitted greatly (p. 13) — while simultaneously curtailing the military's overt political power, which was counterbalanced by the ruling civilian party, the National Democratic Party (NDP), dominated by business elites. This historical overview allows Mandour to illustrate the advantageous position of the military when the January '2011 mass protests erupted' against those with overt power, such as the Ministry of Interior (the police), the NDP, and President Mubarak and his family (p. 14). The military, he argues, was then able to shed off the civilian layer of the regime and rule directly during the transitional period from February 2011 to July 2012, and again after ousting Egypt's first democratically elected president in July 2013. This historical groundwork sets up Mandour's central argument throughout the book, where he demonstrates how the Sisi regime differs significantly from its predecessors and occupies a category of its own.

In the first chapter, titled 'Genesis', Mandour discusses the ideological and rhetorical foundations of the regime, exploring how it constructs its image both internally for Egyptians and externally for the world. He explains how the regime weaponizes a patchwork of different, sometimes even contradictory, ideologies and discourses in its mobilization of the masses. At its core is what Mandour calls 'Sisified Nasserism', which

leaves out the progressive elements of Nasserism, such as social justice and anti-imperialism, while intensifying its most repressive and totalitarian aspects (p. 29). It is also 'deeply entrenched' in pre-existing chauvinistic discourses on Egyptian nationalism which emphasize the "sameness" of the Egyptian nation' (p. 31) and consider any difference a threat to the nation's 'perennial harmony and organic unity' (p. 29). Sisified Nasserism and the nationalist discourses from which it draws are also premised on the dominance and supremacy of the military over the nation. Within this framework, critique and opposition are vilified as treason to the nation. The regime's ideological and rhetorical edifice also includes conservatism, 'a state-sponsored form of Islamism' (p. 40), orientalist depictions of the (civilian) masses who are deemed 'weak, inept, child-like and lazy' in need of the military's paternal guidance and protection (p. 34), as well as conspiracy theories that draw heavily on American neo-conservative War on Terror discourse (p. 35). By synthesizing these ideologies and discourses, Mandour argues, the regime creates different narratives aimed at building and enhancing its appeal and legitimacy with various audiences. A persistent thread binding the regime's rhetorical and ideological framework is its need for an enemy or threat against which it can present itself as a protector, thereby legitimizing its repression and justifying its violence. Furthermore, the regime fosters 'societal repression' through indoctrination, cultivating both readiness and support for the practice of violence (p. 38). Mandour argues that this creates an environment where 'large segments of the population' are implicated in the regime's repression, either by cheering or actively participating in it (p. 38).

In the second chapter, titled 'The New Leviathan', Mandour traces the systematic militarization of Egypt's state apparatus, focusing on the 'legal and constitutional changes' that codify the dominance of the military into the country's constitution (p. 49). He shows how the military has extended its control to the legislative and judicial branches, thereby monopolizing power and solidifying its grip over the country's governance institutions. To undermine, and even erode, the independence of various state institutions and bodies, the regime widely practices a policy which Mandour calls 'hollow[ing] out' (p. 67): removing civilians and technocrats and replacing them with loyalists — almost exclusively retired military personnel — who are appointed to the houses of parliament, local government, and judicial positions. This policy, Mandour explains, accomplishes two objectives. First, it provides lucrative posts for military personnel after retirement, thus incentivizing them to sup-

port the status quo. It also ensures their investment in maintaining the security and stability of the regime whose continuity aligns with their direct interests. Consequently, opportunities for elite-driven future change become narrow, as those complicit in and benefiting from the status quo are bound to resist reform which could threaten their interests and impunity. Mandour warns that this dynamic ultimately makes any struggle for democratization a struggle against the military.

This chapter also details a plethora of repressive laws that criminalize protest and public gathering and that ensure the militarization of public space — which, according to Mandour, encompasses both physical and virtual space, including traditional and social media. For example, Anti-Terror laws, defined in vague terms, are leveraged to prosecute dissent and silence criticism. These laws severely infringe on citizens' rights by legalizing extrajudicial killings, displacing people from their homes and lands, confiscating their property, and restricting their travel. Furthermore, many of these laws and constitutional articles grant the military and the security apparatus total legal immunity — another way the regime guarantees the loyalty and support of the security apparatus. As such, 'all avenues for holding the military accountable within the existing legal structures' are effectively closed, leaving citizens no option but to act outside the law (p. 59). Mandour argues that this systematic militarization does not just restructure the state by allowing the military to 'cannibaliz[e]' its other institutions and branches (p. 67), but it effectively undoes the very nature and foundations of the modern state.

In the third chapter, titled 'There Will Be Blood', Mandour examines the regime's infrastructure and tactics of violence and repression, linking them to the preceding discussion on the regime's ideology as well as the legal, institutional, and constitutional changes which it has enacted. While he has already demonstrated how the security apparatus controls the legislative and judiciary branches of the state as well as local governments, in this chapter, he points to how political parties and labor unions have also been penetrated and closely monitored. Discussing the regime's tactics of violence, Mandour cites several statistics and reports by human rights organizations detailing widespread repressive practices such as forcible disappearances, extrajudicial killings, mass incarceration, torture, and pervasive surveillance. Parallel to the spread of extrajudicial killings, the regime frequently employs mass trials that lack due process, often resulting in mass death sentences. Mandour describes these trials as 'state-sanctioned killing, with a legal veneer'

(p. 94). He also details the dire conditions within detention centers in addition to the introduction of new policies that allow 'the regime to imprison its opponents indefinitely, without the need for a conviction' (p. 96). Mandour argues that these measures 'radically transformed the Egyptian penal system into a tool for slow executions' (p. 96).

The chapter further provides a comprehensive analysis of the regime's 'complex infrastructure of repression' and its 'mass urban engineering' campaign (pp. 84, 106). This includes a mega-prison construction spree — 'a total of thirty-five prisons between 2011 and 2021' (p. 95) — presented as major achievements in its 'Orwellian propaganda' (p. 99). In addition to expanding the infrastructure of the penal system, the regime is constructing several new cities, including the New Administrative Capital (NAC), which are fortified and strategically located far from population centers; they are also well-connected to escape routes in case of socio-economic or political upheaval. Mandour explains that these new cities, especially NAC, represent 'the most tangible manifestation of the regime's fear of a mass urban uprising' similar to the one that happened in 2011 (p. 104). They are thus constructed to shield the regime and the elites from the masses, curtailing the latter's ability to exert any pressure on the regime or disrupt its functioning as government bodies are moved away from population centers. This development is coupled with the regime's ongoing restructuring of urban landscapes within population centers, so as to make them more easily controlled, patrolled, and surveilled, while also facilitating the rapid deployment of the security forces across the country should the need arise. This urban transformation includes demolishing the areas and neighborhoods where the working classes and urban poor reside, displacing the residents to new urban settlements on the outskirts, designed to be easily policed, where they become tenants rather than owners and live in relative isolation, far from urban centers and facilities. Mandour also highlights the economic aspect of this mass urban engineering campaign, noting that the lands from which the poor are dispossessed are then sold to foreign investors. The result, Mandour explains, is a restructured urban reality where the poor are banished to heavily policed settlements, elites are shielded in distant fortresses, and those remaining in urban centers are subjected to intense control and surveillance.

This chapter also discusses the insurgency that began years before the coup, examining the military's shifting response to it. Mandour contrasts the military's initial refusal — before the coup and during the

one-year presidency of Mohammed Morsi — to wage a counterinsurgency campaign with the post-coup military regime's approach under Sisi. As the Minister of Defense before the coup, Sisi had asserted that the military's 'mission is not to combat terrorism', warning that such involvement could lead to significant civilian casualties, which would thus foster hostility between civilians and the military (p. 101). However, after the coup, the Sisi regime waged what it called a War on Terror, in which it employed immense and indiscriminate violence. Its counterterrorism operations, particularly in North Sinai, involved the use of heavy weaponry, airstrikes, mass 'displacement and depopulation' of entire cities, and thus led to widespread civilian casualties (p. 103). Mandour argues that the regime's extreme repression and indiscriminate violence not only fueled the insurgency but also acted as a 'super-spreader of radicalism' (p. 98). Describing this dynamic as 'a vicious cycle of violence', he contends that the regime's repression 'fed a burgeoning insurgency which in turn' provided the regime with an enemy, and thus a reason, to justify its repression and intensify its violence (p. 104).

In the fourth chapter, titled 'Pots, Pans and Guns', Mandour examines the transformation of Egypt's political economy from a 'state-centric' model of capital accumulation before the coup into what he terms a 'militarized form of aggressive state capitalism' under the Sisi regime, with the military emerging as the 'dominant economic actor' and policymaker in the country (p. 113). Mandour argues that this entrenched economic dominance is a deliberate political strategy, aiming to prevent political rivals from developing an 'independent economic base' that enables them to challenge the military (p. 114) — much like the military's own economically advantageous position under the previous regimes enabled it to overthrow the regimes and seize power during the 2011 revolution and the 2013 protests. This chapter also details the various 'economic deformities' created by the regime (p. 123), explaining how it provides the military with free labor, free use of national resources, tax exemptions, exclusive government supply contracts, and total control over a vertically integrated supply chain, all while systematically weakening supervisory state institutions tasked with monitoring and combating corruption. These policies are also accompanied by regressive taxation, cuts to social spending, and capital accumulation in unproductive sectors such as construction and infrastructure. Outlining the devastating consequences of this economic model, Mandour highlights the massive increase in debt, erosion of the middle class, rising levels of poverty and extreme poverty, and significant damage to key

sectors — such as manufacturing — which are essential for sustainable economic development.

Importantly, Mandour highlights the role of international capital in both the ‘increased pauperization of Egyptians’ and the consolidation of the military regime’s security and dominance in Egypt, illustrating how its repression is both politically and financially supported by the regime’s international partners (p. 130). He argues that international monetary institutions, such as the IMF and the World Bank, the regime’s regional allies and wealthy patrons like the Gulf countries, in addition to Western countries — the primary exporters of weapons and surveillance technology, which are all financed through debt — are all directly complicit in not only exploiting and impoverishing Egyptians but also enabling their repression. He also argues that the regime has deliberately ‘entrenched itself in the global financial system’ (p. 130), ensuring that its survival and security align with the interests of its international creditors. Consequently, the struggle for democratization in Egypt becomes far more challenging, as it would directly conflict, not just with the military, but also with a range of wealthy and powerful international actors with vested interests in maintaining the status quo.

The fifth and final chapter, titled ‘Ozymandias’, presents Mandour’s assessment of the status quo and his predictions for the future of the regime and the country. Despite its tight control over the country, Mandour asserts that the regime is ‘brittle and inflexible’ (p. 153), incapable of reforming itself to absorb shocks or address crises. Its only response to any challenge is to intensify its repression and violence, which ultimately renders the status quo unsustainable. Reflecting on the regime’s durability and the country’s future, Mandour outlines three potential scenarios. The first is elite-led self-reform, which would transform the regime ‘into a system of dual military and civilian rule’ (p. 153). While such an evolution could increase the regime’s longevity, it necessitates implementing structural changes that curtail the dominance of the military and overhaul its entrenched economic model of militarized capitalism. However, since the regime prioritizes maintaining the cohesion of its base — primarily the security apparatus — as the key to its durability, it is unlikely to pursue reforms that clash with its base’s interests. This, Mandour argues, ultimately makes the regime ‘resistant to elite-led reform’ (p. 152). The second scenario is an ‘explosion’ (p. 152), in which Mandour predicts the regime to ‘collapse in a wave of mass bloodletting’, similar to what happened in Libya (p. 153).

Several factors suggest the regime's preparedness for this scenario: its ideological edifice and indoctrination efforts, its construction of new cities for elites, and the economic benefits and legal impunity extended to all layers of the security apparatus to secure their loyalty. This, according to Mandour, is different from the Mubarak era, where the opportunities to amass wealth were primarily accorded to the top brass. Mandour warns that unless 'unrest seeps into the coercive apparatus of the state itself, inhibiting its ability to deal with protest', the use of mass state violence remains 'a horrific possibility' (p. 146). Finally, the third scenario is for the regime to 'slowly decay' (p. 153), leaving it vulnerable and unable to withstand pressure, ultimately culminating in its 'rapid implosion' (p. 155). While all three scenarios predict the regime's eventual collapse, Mandour maintains that the military will likely continue to play a political role and retain 'substantial privileges' in whatever system emerges after this regime's demise (p. 156).

Mandour concludes the book with a brief section on the persistent attempts at bottom-up change — a thorough discussion of which, he acknowledges, was beyond the scope of the book and its argument about the Sisi regime representing a rupture and enacting a passive revolution. Nevertheless, he emphasizes that micro-level resistance has always existed, noting that it 'has taken a variety of forms and has been waged on different terrains' (p. 157). He briefly surveys several examples, including labor activism, hunger strikes in prisons, ideological resistance to the regime's chauvinism and conservatism, and 'politicized mass protests', such as the 2016 demonstrations against the transfer of the Egyptian islands of Tiran and Sanafir to Saudi sovereignty, the 2019 protests against corruption, and the 2020 protests against demolitions of what the regime labelled as slums or 'illegal housing' (p. 158). While these acts of resistance have not always been political, Mandour argues that their persistence provides hope that, in the future, such micro-resistance could 'coalesce into a coherent political project that can offer a real alternative to the military's dominance' (p. 157).

Although Mandour briefly acknowledges the limitations of his study in addressing bottom-up change and, in doing so, implicitly invites further research into this area, there are other limitations in the book's analysis and approach. One such limitation is that the book sometimes fails to subject the regime's sources to sustained critical scrutiny and occasionally accepts certain narratives at face value without deeper examination. There are instances in which Mandour maintains a tone of neutral reporting that avoids investigation or speculation where

further questioning and examination would be welcome. For example, Mandour's argument regarding the decentralization of violence after the coup — wherein the periphery acts without the center's direct control or permission and is sometimes politically inconvenient for the regime — could benefit from deeper examination. He overlooks the fact that the center extends beyond merely shielding the periphery from accountability; it also actively rewards and promotes those responsible for violence and repression.⁴ Another limitation is that it is unclear what criteria Mandour uses to characterize something as 'popular' or 'public', or to categorize a demonstration as a 'mass protest'. For instance, he fails to mention and account for the persistent anti-coup protests that occurred daily for almost two years after the coup. The sheer number of these protests surpassed those against Morsi — which are widely regarded as numerous and large — during his presidency from 30 June 2012 to 3 July 2013.⁵ The relationship between the regime and its civilian base also warrants further study to better understand its dynamics and complexities, which could strengthen Mandour's arguments about societal repression. While Mandour discusses the central role of violence and the regime's ideological edifice in tethering the base to the regime, he does not clarify what or who constitutes the regime's civilian base, which has not been an unchanging monolith. Furthermore, since the book refers to the regime's ideological foundation as 'Sisified Nasserism', engaging with the literature on Nasserism⁶ — particularly its conceptualization of the masses and their relationship with the regime — would have provided greater insight into how this regime differs from its predecessors and better illuminated its relationship with its base. Finally, Mandour's use of Gramsci's passive revolution framework, while interesting, raises questions about its suitability. He significantly modifies the concept to make it applicable in

4 See, for example, this article in Arabic which documents several cases in which officers convicted of torturing civilians to death were granted presidential pardons and promotions. 'خاص... عفو رئاسي بمصر لضباط أدينوا بقضية تعذيب حتى الموت' [Exclusive: Presidential Pardon in Egypt for Officers Convicted in Torture-to-Death Cases], *Arabi21*, 22 October 2023 <<https://arabi21.com/story/1469828/-خاص-عفو-رئاسي-بمصر-لضباط-أدينوا-بقضية-تعذيب-حتى-الموت>> [accessed 28 November 2024].

5 See Amy Austin Holmes and Hussein Baoumi, 'Egypt's Protests by the Numbers', *Sada*, 29 January 2016, <<https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2016/01/egypts-protests-by-the-numbers?lang=en>> [accessed 28 November 2024].

6 Such literature includes Sherif Younis, *الزحف المقدس: مظاهرات التنحي وتشكل عبادة ناصر* [The Sacred March: The Resignation Demonstrations and the Formation of the Cult of Nasser] (Cairo: Merit Publishing House, 2005) and Sherif Younis, *نداء الشعب: تاريخ نقدي للإيديولوجيا الناصرية* [The Call of the People: A Critical History of the Nasserist Ideology] (Dar El-Shorouk, 2012).

the Egyptian context, yet he does not engage with existing scholarship that applies Gramscian theories to contemporary Egypt, which could have complicated, and potentially challenged, his argument about the Sisi regime representing an anomaly in modern Egyptian history.⁷

These limitations notwithstanding, *Egypt under El-Sisi* thoroughly examines the systematic, structural, and institutionalized nature of violence and repression under the post-coup regime of General Sisi in Egypt. It is thus a highly relevant resource for the field of perpetrator studies — even though it does not directly engage with the field — especially given its focus on a context that has yet to be studied within it. Mandour identifies 'the massacres of the summer of 2013' as 'the regime's foundational moment' (p. 20). This emphasizes the fundamental role of violence and repression, which are not mere tools but integral to the regime's genesis, legitimacy, and durability. The book addresses issues central to perpetrator studies, including complicity, which it explores on multiple levels: from the complicity of the regime's international partners, to that of political parties and state institutions, to the societal repression that implicates large segments of the population, either through active participation in violence or its passive support. Mandour's analysis of the 'pact' between the regime and its security forces is particularly pertinent (p. 88), as it details the mechanisms — such as propaganda, indoctrination, legal impunity, and economic privileges — that normalize and incentivize perpetration

7 Scholars such as Sara Salem, Roberto Roccu, and Brecht De Smet have extensively debated how Gramsci's theories and insights apply to key moments in Egypt's modern history, including Nasserism, neo-liberalization under Sadat and Mubarak, the 2011 mass protests, and the 2013 coup. Salem characterizes Nasserism as a 'hegemonic passive revolution' (p. 63) and Sadat's neo-liberalization as a non-hegemonic passive revolution. De Smet, in contrast, sees Nasserism as a non-hegemonic passive revolution and argues that Sisi's rise to power is better understood through Caesarism. Roccu, on the other hand, argues against the application of passive revolution to Egypt's neoliberal turn, describing it instead as a counter-reformation. He considers the military's role during the 2011 mass protests — in ousting president Mubarak, prosecuting him and his associates, and implementing limited populist economic policies — an attempt to contain the revolution. He argues that this could be considered a passive revolution aimed at preventing the protests from escalating into 'a social revolution' that enacts deeper structural changes beyond merely removing the head of the regime (p. 39). However, he contends that after the 2013 coup, with the regime relying heavily on repression and violence, 'the current phase is much better understood as a full-fledged counterrevolution' (p. 39). See Brecht De Smet, *Gramsci on Tahrir: Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Egypt* (Pluto Press, 2016); Roberto Roccu, 'Neoliberalism as Passive Revolution? Insights from the Egyptian Experience', in *Revisiting Gramsci's Notebooks*, ed. by Francesca Antonini, Aaron Bernstein, Lorenzo Fusaro, and Robert Jackson (Brill, 2020), pp. 23–41; and Sara Salem, *Anticolonial Afterlives in Egypt: The Politics of Hegemony* (Cambridge University Press, 2020).

within the regime. Furthermore, the book's extensive documentation of how the Sisi regime militarized the state apparatus and public space makes valuable sources available in English to international scholars. As such, the book represents a rich contribution to future scholarship on perpetration and perpetrators in Egypt.

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Hagar Abdalbar is a graduate of the Research Master's Programme in Comparative Literary Studies at Utrecht University.