



Bernard Rougier & Stephane Lacroix (eds.)

Egypt's Revolutions: Politics, Religion, and Social Movements

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Egypt has always been a central country in the Arab and Islamic Worlds; therefore, its 2011 revolution has caught the attention of many academics. *Egypt's Revolutions: Politics, Religion, and Social Movements* represents an attempt to understand what happened in Egypt since 2011 in order to make sense of where the country is heading.

The book is divided into four parts preceded by an introduction. In their introduction, the editors shed lights on the contradictory dynamics that shaped the 2011 revolution. In their view, the contrasting motives and visions of the main political actors (Islamists, the military, liberals, trade unionists, and revolutionaries) are the keys to understanding the political and institutional instability that plagued Egypt from the fall of Hosni Mubarak in 2011 to the fall of Mohamed Morsi in 2013.

Part one—The Muslim Brotherhood Faces the Test of Power— focuses on the rise and fall of the group. Patrick Haenni blames the MB for their obsession of providing stability through governance (the completion of the institutional framework) instead of governmentality (consultation and openness to the political class). On his part, Marie Vannetzel sheds light on the internal dynamics of the MB and its effect on the group's societal appeal. In his view, acquiring a legal status was a major challenge as the group's existence was always related to its prohibition. Moving to the economic aspect, Amr Adly argues that the political failure of Islamists is the product of their inability to overcome the structural contradictions of Egypt's political economy. Adly highlights some of the root causes of the revolution, but he does not provide a specific recipe to overcome them. He leaves the reader wondering about the valid alternatives that could have been available to the MB while in power.

Part two deals with Government, Institutions and Political Processes. Clement Steuer argues that post-revolutionary elections will have a long lasting imprint on Egypt's political life. On his part, Nathan Brown shows how the Judiciary perceived the revolution as a challenge that increased with the presidency of Mohamed Morsi. He sees the real contest in the future to be between the forces of popular sovereignty and democracy on one hand, and bureaucracy and professionalism on the other. On his part, Zaid Al Ali critically analyses Egypt's 2014 constitution highlighting some of its major drawbacks: the excessive independence of state's institutions, the unimproved status of civil and political rights and the lack of any enforcing mechanism, and the tilted balance of power in favor of the presidency. Meanwhile, Bernard Rougier and Hala Bayoumi introduce a sociological reading of the Egyptian voting patterns in the 2011-2013 elections. Through a quantitative analysis of the electoral data, they shed light on the relationship between the social category and political preference as well as the social and geographical cleavages that currently divide the Egyptian society.

Part three concentrates on Social Actors and Protest Movements. Stephane Lacroix and Ahmed Shalata explain the rise of revolutionary Salafism after 2011 showing how it benefited from the mobilizing networks that existed before the revolution. They



believe that the brutal repression of the current regime will probably lead to radicalization among segments of Islamists. On his part, Ismail Alexandrani gives a rich analytical account of the situation in Sinai and the different phases of jihadism there. His main argument seems to be that the state's policies toward the area, particularly the current military operations, are the real production of terrorism. Alexandrani's deep understanding and knowledge of local communities provide him with an extensive network of sources. This, however, sometimes negatively affects his chapter by looking more like an investigative report than an academic piece of writing.

Nadine Abdalla shifts the focus to the labor movement by analyzing the challenges facing its institutionalization and relationship to politics since January 25, 2011 revolution. According to Abdalla, there is no consensus on the legal framework regulating the unions, in addition to the latter's low efficiency resulting from the lack of state recognition, experience and financial resources. Gaetar Du Roy discusses another social actor: the Copts. He argues that the challenge facing the Copts after the fall of the MB is great because they have to push for their demands without siding with the current regime. The reader was still wondering about the role of the Coptic Church itself as a social actor and its relationship to Coptic activism. Urban planning and the role of civil society in this regard is the focus of Roman Stadnicki. The chapter attracts attention to the relationship between the organization of public space and politics; an area of study that still needs further research.

Part four is biographical sketches of some Egyptian political figures. Noticeable here is the different approaches in writing these biographies. Some biographies were positive about the person under investigation, others were more critical, while a third group balanced the different views involved.

There is a common conviction among all the contributors that 2011 revolution was an event that has shaken the stagnant water and would eventually shake the grip of authoritarianism. It was not very clear, though, the mechanisms through which this change could take place. The book's attempt to understand what is happening in Egypt was also not very comprehensive. In discussing social actors, for instance, Egyptian youth groups were completely absent. Media role is also missing despite its undeniable influence over the course of the revolution. Most surprising point is the lack of any deep discussion of the military's role and its stakes in the overall system.

Overall, the book is illuminating, insightful and engaging from the very beginning. The title itself can start endless debates: why is the use of the plural form of revolution? Was it only one revolution or two? It constitutes a useful reading for those who are interested in the so-called Arab Spring and Middle East politics in general.

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