

Abdalla F. Hassan

Media, Revolution and Politics in Egypt: The Story of an Uprising. London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2015. x + 276 pp., ISBN 978-1-78453-218-5.

Egypt's uprising of 25 January 2011 may not have been a Facebook revolution, which it is sometimes depicted as, but many decisive battles of Egypt's most recent revolution were certainly fought in the media—in the press, television and in online networks. Eventually, the revolution was defeated, and Hassan's book shows that the regime's ability to dominate and manipulate the media was an important constituent of that defeat. Hassan also convincingly shows that in the age of social media, press media and television remain of crucial importance. The latter, especially played a decisive role in many events.

The first 200 pages of the book provide a chronological narrative of key events, starting from the years before the revolution and concluding with the consolidation of al-Sisi's presidency. The narrative records key events with a focus on the way they were mediated—and how certain media events themselves became sites of struggle. Most of the time, Hassan provides a straightforward reportage that is valuable and readable for anyone who wants to understand how events unfolded and how different media participated in the flow of events. It is only at the end of the book that Hassan provides a hindsight analysis with fourteen key observations. Those observations are a healthy reminder that while media offer a means to question and protest against authoritarian regimes, they can also serve those regimes in many ways. Many of Hassan's observations have wider relevance, notably his two final points: 'Propaganda and conspiracy theories have lost none of their efficacy'; and 'Citizens are forming their own personal truth narratives' (p. 120–212).

Most of the book reads like reportage from the moment. At times, this results in interesting inconsistencies that reflect the shifting perception of the events over time, especially in the perceptions of Egypt's liberal/left revolutionaries. For example, Mursi's short presidency appears much more oppressive in chapter 5, which describes his administration's struggle to seize control of the media and the government. Yet, in hindsight (in chapter 6), it appears to have had 'a wide margin of freedom' (p. 196) when compared to the return to power of the military and its much more successful and brutal power grab over the media and the state.

Any chronological narrative of events extending over several years inevitably faces the problem of selection. In terms of focus, the narrative highlights the struggles between liberal and regime media. In particular, the comedian Bassem Youssef gains much deserved attention in that narrative. Media closer to the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi groups receive comparably less atten-

tion, except when they were the cause of controversy in the liberal media. In terms of chronology, some key turning points of the revolutionary period are mentioned only in passing, such as the constitutional referendum and parliamentary elections of 2011. Egyptian liberal and leftist revolutionaries were remarkably successful in mobilizing street protests and gaining media attention, but notoriously bad at winning elections, and Hassan's narrative tends to highlight those moments in which the liberal/left current were able to do something rather than those moments in which they failed. This is a limitation but not necessarily a flaw. It is almost impossible to write about the wonderful, hopeful moment of the revolution and its bitter, terrible defeat without a sense of commitment to one side or another. Hassan makes clear his commitment to the hope that the revolution that will bring Egyptians bread, freedom and justice is yet to be completed. That hope will make the book worth reading in years to come.

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