repudiation script became entrenched among Israeli officials, intellectuals, and a large portion of the Israeli public.

As the book closes, Stein reflects on her attention to failures of cameras, especially by the Israeli military: "It is my hope that such scenes of failure, with the Israeli state and its technologies out of synch, can provide a modest means of unsettling the colonial present. Perhaps in such failures, other political futures can become visible" (162). She reminds us of what can be achieved with trenchant and systematic critique—even as we may feel overwhelmed by the obduracy of state violence.

Screen Shots enters a literature that at its core examines new media and photographic or journalistic realism in Palestine and Israel. As evidenced by the book's dense footnotes, Stein's range is (as usual) remarkable: she is equally well-versed in theories of photography and technological change as in the study and history of Palestine and Israel. Here she provides an excellent framework for examining a range of questions, from the current technologies of military surveillance to digital witnessing to the fantasies associated with digital media. We are fortunate to have this seminal work as a guide as we try to make other political futures become visible.

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Enlightenment on the Eve of Revolution: The Egyptian and Syrian Debates

Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019). Pp. 226. $90.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780231176323

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In her insightful new book, *Enlightenment on the Eve of Revolution*, Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab presents a bracing account of Arab intellectual discourse during the 1990s and 2000s. Although Kassab is appropriately careful not to suggest that elite and academic writings are the primary catalysts of the revolutionary action that broke out across the region during the early 2010s, her book helps to contextualize and historicize the emergence of the Arab uprisings nonetheless. Kassab is a leading intellectual historian of the modern Arab world, and her first book on cultural critique in the post-1967 Arab intellectual field remains an indispensable study.[1]

In *Enlightenment on the Eve of the Revolution*, Kassab turns now toward the discourse of *tanwīr* (enlightenment) thinking among mostly Egyptian and Syrian intellectuals during the 1990s and 2000s. Her chief argument is that *tanwīr* discourse is understood and deployed by its advocates as a variety of political humanism, one which "calls for the free and public practice of reason in view of producing knowledge that enlightens people about the realities they find themselves in and nurtures their yearning for a dignified and free existence," no less than "the reconstruction of the Arab human being crushed by brutal regimes" (8). In this regard, the fact that demands for political rights, freedom, and social justice in the Arab uprisings were accompanied by calls for recognition of "the humanity of people and

[1] Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought : Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

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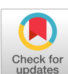

their dignity, rights, and liberties" has intellectual foundations in this critical *tanwīrī* discourse of the 1990s and 2000s (155).

Rather than getting bogged down in the question of whether Arab intellectuals have been beholden to the European Enlightenment tradition, Kassab notes that "the Western Enlightenment legacy per se was not a focus of the *tanwīr* debates," but rather that it was the Nahda, the Arabic renaissance of the 19th century in its multiple incarnations, that "represented some form of tanwir" to contemporary intellectuals (3). Indeed, to circumvent the twinned problematic of European diffusion versus Arab emulation, Kassab uses the term *tanwīr* rather than enlightenment throughout her study. This, in turn, allows her to identify different moments of fracture in the Arab intellectual field during this period, namely between statist and nonstatist viewpoints and between, for lack of better terms, secularist and Islamist perspectives.

The first two chapters focus on the case of Egypt. Kassab notes that the secularist–Islamist divide is the key distinguishing feature of *tanwīrī* discourse in 1990s Egypt. Chapter 1, "Secularist, Governmental, and Islamist Tanwir Debates in Egypt in the 1990s," focuses on the proliferation of *tanwīrī* discourses in Egypt, not only between secularists and Islamists but between regime attempts to co-opt those discourses and independent attempts to remain oppositional toward the state. The writings of Mourad Wahba, a philosophy professor at Ain Shams University, frame the ensuing discussion of Gaber Asfour and Muhammad ʿImara, leading secularist and Islamist thinkers, respectively. Kassab teases out what she calls the "Wahba paradox," namely, the extent to which Wahba himself and many other Egyptian intellectuals wind up "defending freedom, critical thought, and democracy while giving unconditional support to the absolutist state against the Islamist-terrorist peril" (20). In a darkly ironic historical development, this position would reappear in dramatic fashion in the age of the al-Sisi regime. Literary critic and cultural commissar Gaber Asfour epitomizes the Wahba paradox, as he and many fellow intellectual travelers "explicitly or implicitly accepted that this fight against the total Islamization of state and society would be undertaken at any price, even that of sacrificing human life, human rights, and freedom" (25). Through a close reading of his *Hawamish ʿala Daftar al-Tanwir* (Marginalia on the Notebook of Tanwir, 1994), Kassab points out the contradictions between Asfour's ostensible intellectual commitments and a willingness to suppress those in deference to his loyalty to the Egyptian regime. For Kassab, the work of historian and philosopher Muhammad ʿImara points to the extent to which Islamist intellectuals more or less use the same language of *tanwīr* in their calls for social justice, progress, and human dignity, even if they also draw on a reservoir of *turāth*, a slightly different set of touchstones and parameters for cultivating historical memory and cultural patrimony.

In the following chapter, "The Deconstruction of the 1990s Egyptian Tanwir Debates by Egyptian Critics at the Turn of the Millennium," Kassab considers how subsequent intellectuals, namely, sociologist Mona Abaza, the late religious studies scholar Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, and historian Sharif Yunus received, adapted, and rejected the inheritance of those earlier debates. The key difference Kassab identifies among these later scholars is their "clear commitment to values of emancipation" founded an immanent critique of the Egyptian, Arab, and Islamic condition, which amounts to what she calls "a different practice of tanwir" (39).

In Chapters 3 and 4 on Syria, Kassab intriguingly adapts a metaphor invoked by Syrian playwright Saadallah Wannous to distinguish the "Sisyphean" struggle of Syrian intellectuals under Baʿth rule from the 1970s to the 1990s from the "Promethean moment" of reformist possibility during the 2000s. Although the question of political Islam is not absent from Syrian history during the late 20th and early 21st centuries, Kassab is clear that the primary axis of contention regarding the matter of *tanwīr* (as political humanism) in Syria was around "the state's despotism, corruption, and brutality" (83). Chapter 3, "Tanwir Debates in Syria in the 1990s: The Sisyphean Moment" is about a wide range of takes on the question of *tanwīr* in 1990s Syria. Unlike Chapter 1, which focused on three intellectuals in Egypt, this

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chapter is populated by many more Syrian artists and intellectuals weighing in on this issue before Kassab dedicates the most space to playwright Saadallah Wannous and Palestinian-Syrian literary critic Faysal Darraj. Her primary source for much of Chapter 3 is the short-lived but intellectually dense periodical *Qadaya wa-Shahadat*.

Next, Chapter 4 is titled "Tanwir and the Damascus Spring at the Turn of the Millennium: The Promethean Moment." A momentous event took place in June 2000: Hafiz al-Asad died and was succeeded by his son, Bashar al-Asad. In the ensuing "Promethean moment," Kassab argues, "the term *tanwir* appeared less frequently" as "the primary concern was no longer theoretical and the priority was no longer the reconstitution of a dismembered intellectual, moral, and political memory" (125). The Damascus Spring of 2000 and the gradually expanding space for cultural and intellectual experimentation during the first decade of Bashar al-Asad's rule have something to do with the development of new ideas of political possibility and new horizons of expectation for Syrian intellectuals and ordinary citizens alike.

Kassab makes clear that there is no inevitable pathway from the democratic criticism of Arab "enlightenment" intellectuals in the 1990s and 2000s in Egypt and Syria to the Arab uprisings of 2010, 2011, and after. Be that as it may, Kassab provides an important corrective to the widespread and reductive arguments that Arab intellectuals have not played a role in the transformation of their societies over the past quarter century, up until and beyond the uprisings that have exhilarated and shocked a generation in the Arab region and around the world. In that regard, *Enlightenment on the Eve of Revolution* is essential reading for all those seeking to understand the history, significance, and consequences of the Arab uprisings, and anyone interested in modern and contemporary Arab intellectual history broadly conceived.

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