


REVIEW ESSAY

From Dictatorship Syndrome to False Truths: The Political Evolution of Alaa al-Aswany

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The Republic of False Truths. Alaa Al Aswany, trans. S. R. Fellowes (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2021). Pp. 416. \$28.95 cloth. ISBN: 978-0-307-95722-1

The Dictatorship Syndrome. Alaa Al Aswany, trans. Russell Harris (London: Haus, 2019). Pp. 171. £12.95 cloth. ISBN: 978-1-912208-59-3

The majority of Egyptians are happy to be oppressed . . . They hated the revolution from the beginning because it embarrassed them in front of themselves . . . The Egyptians live in the Republic of False Truths . . . Everything in Egypt is a lie, except for the revolution. Only the revolution is true, which is why they hate it, because it shows up their corruption and their hypocrisy. (*Republic*, 386)

Asmaa had hoped against hope, that the uprising would uplift the Egyptian people from their shackles. But as she bore the brunt of the counterrevolution's crackdown, enduring sexually humiliating virginity tests by the Egyptian state's "Apparatus", she eventually decided that Egypt was beyond saving. By the end of Alaa al-Aswany's latest novel, *The Republic of False Truths*, his revolutionary heroine has decided to leave Egypt and seek exile in the UK. In her final letter to her comrade and putative love interest Mazen, she begs her confidante to follow suit, and leave Egypt as soon as he has been released from state custody. Yet even as the uprising failed to supplant dictatorship, it remains sacred in the hearts of its supporters. This is evidenced by Madany, father of the fallen revolutionary leader Khaled, who exacts his own justice by arranging a hit on the police officer who murdered his son. The revolution lives on, but only when the revolutionaries take justice into their own hands.

Indeed, in *The Republic of False Truths* Alaa Al-Aswany offers a deeply engaging narrative of the rise and fall of the Egyptian revolution. At nearly 400 pages, it is a heftier read than his international bestseller *The Yacoubian Building* (‘Imarat Ya‘qubiyān, 2002). Set in Cairo, *Republic* offers a ten-year overview of the years leading up to and then immediately following the 2011 Egyptian uprising and the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak. Replete with a diverse cast of characters, each representing a different spectrum of class, religious identity, and political relation to the Egyptian deep state, the novel follows their journeys in parallel, as some become further entrenched in the state Apparatus (*al-Jihaz*), whereas others become politically awakened for the first time, seeing this unique moment of protest as a rebirth in its own right. The stylistic sophistication of the work lies in the offer of solitary narrative accounts of each of its characters, only to later weave their stories into the shared stories of the other revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries.

The novel is worthy of serious literary criticism and analysis, both as a representation of the genre of revolutionary literature and of avant-garde modern Arabic literature more

broadly. To that end, I will offer a critical analysis of some key characters in this essay, particularly the regressive figures who stand by the Egyptian state. But my primary purpose here is not to offer a literary explication. Rather, I engage this novel specifically to offer an account of Alaa al-Aswany's development as a political thinker and spokesperson.

This evolution of Aswany's political thinking, I submit, will offer critical commentary on the evolution of political upheaval in Egypt more broadly. For Aswany is not simply an arm-chair novelist, but also a longtime political activist. A founding member of the Egyptian Movement for Change (Kefaya), Aswany quickly became a prominent voice for the Egyptian revolution in 2011, visiting Tahrir Square nearly daily to join protests and utilizing his fluency in English to engage international media. Yet as the revolutionary tides turned between 2011 and 2013, Aswany found himself cheering on the return of military rule, becoming one of the most prominent supporters of the 2011 uprising to justify the coup of 2013 and the rise of 'Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi.¹

The reception of his latest novel at least offers the possibility that Aswany has matured in his thinking since his regressive posturing in 2013. Published in 2018 in Lebanon under the Arabic title *Jumhuriyat Ka'an* (literally, "a so-called republic"), *The Republic of False Truths* landed Aswany in considerable hot water both in Egypt and throughout the Arab world.² Banned throughout most of the region, the book gave rise to a lawsuit against its author by the Egyptian government, accusing Aswany of "insulting the president, the Armed Forces, and judicial institutions."³ Aswany is now in exile from Egypt, and several Egyptian colleagues have warned me that he is seen as increasingly irrelevant in comparison to his high profile in the glory days. Still, the possibility of a prominent revolutionary-turned-regressive having had a potential change of heart would do much to color the full story of the Egyptian revolution. Luckily, Aswany in recent years has offered substantive writings that help piece together the evolution of his political worldview following the events of 2011, and especially 2013. I have commented on that evolution elsewhere, but perhaps the most meaningful vista to make sense of Aswany's politics is his recent manifesto, originally written in Arabic but first published in English translation, *The Dictatorship Syndrome*.⁴ Making sense of his latest novel specifically as a referendum on his political philosophy, then, requires reading it in conversation with *The Dictatorship Syndrome*.

The theoretical lens offered by Aswany's recent political manifesto reveals his latest novel to be a narrative account of a society embroiled in the very maladies of the "dictatorship syndrome." And, sadly, even revolutionary upheaval proved insufficient to stave off the insidiousness of that syndrome. Three chapters of *The Dictatorship Syndrome* manifest the central thesis of the fictional *Republic of False Truths*, and the creation of an environment that allowed dictatorship to persist despite the aims of the 2011 Egyptian uprising. First, Aswany's observations on conspiracy theory materialize in the novel. As he puts it, "without exception, every dictator who has seized power in the modern era has ridden the crest of a conspiracy theory," pointing to examples in Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab world, as well as comparative cases like Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu (*Dictatorship*, 40). Conspiratorial thinking, according to the author, serves both to subvert a dictator's accountability for his putative crimes, and to provide a basis for circumventing the development of democratic institutions and the rule of law.⁵

¹ This evolution in Aswany's thinking from 2011 to 2013 has been documented at some length. See Joel Gordon, "Egypt's New Liberal Crisis," in Dalia F. Fahmy and Daanish Faruqi, eds., *Egypt and the Contradictions of Liberalism: Illiberal Intelligentsia and the Future of Egyptian Democracy* (London: Oneworld, 2017), 317–35.

² 'Alaa' al-Aswany, *Jumhuriyat Ka'an* (Beirut: Dar al-Adab, 2018).

³ See Kevin Blankinship, "In Alaa al-Aswany's New Novel, Dictatorship Keeps Winning," *Foreign Policy*, 1 August 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/08/01/alaa-al-aswanys-novel-republic-false-truths-review-arab-spring-dictatorship>.

⁴ Daanish Faruqi, "Alaa Al-Aswany Believes in Democracy, Except When He Doesn't," *Foreign Policy*, 1 October 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/01/alaa-al-aswany-believes-in-democracy-except-when-he-doesnt>.

⁵ Aswany is not alone in his observations about the centrality of conspiracy to dictatorship in the Middle East. See Matthew Gray, "Revisiting Saddam Hussein's Political Language: The Sources and Roles of Conspiracy Theories," *Arab*

One primary character in *The Republic of False Truths*, General Alwany, distinguished leader of the Egyptian security apparatus, offers a clear embodiment of the ubiquity of conspiratorial thinking in the Egyptian deep state. Specifically, General Alwany leverages conspiracy to create the atmosphere necessary to trump the rule of law. Even before the 2011 Egyptian uprising unfolds, he subtly relies on the language of conspiracy to deter his daughter Danya from showing solidarity with the martyr Khaled Sa'id, the young blogger murdered by Egyptian state security forces on June 6, 2010. By virtue of his state position, he insists to Danya, "I can assure you that there is a general conspiracy against Egypt. And your colleagues who are inciting people against the police are, intentionally or not, helping the conspiracy to succeed" (*Republic*, 44). Granted, prior to the events of 2011 General Alwany is more understated in his invocations of conspiracy, but this inconspicuous reliance on the idea of an ongoing threat against the Egyptian state is central to his role as leader of the Apparatus. The political dissidents whose torture he unapologetically stewards deserve no sympathy in his eyes, precisely because they constitute a conspiratorial threat against mother Egypt.

As the revolution starts to unfold in 2011, General Alwany drops all pretense to subtlety; he embraces full-throated placations to sedition to justify a harsh crackdown on the demonstrators in Tahrir Square. Dismissing the events of Tahrir as "foreign to the Egyptian mentality," General Alwany reveals plans to cut telecommunications, open the prisons, and allow the use of live ammunition by officers—at the same time astutely assuring that no paper trail exists to prove that officers were issued with bullets. Alwany recognizes that these initiatives are unlawful, but proceeds on the premise that necessity justifies subverting the rule of law. That state of exception, he maintains, is necessary because the Egyptian state faces an existential threat in this moment. He relies explicitly on the vocabulary of conspiracy to instill loyalty in the officers under his command, reminding them that the demonstrators seek the Egyptian state's destruction: "Each officer must believe that he is in a real battle to defend Egypt. I want leaflets from the ministry distributed to every officer and every man in the ranks. They have to understand that the kids in Tahrir are a bunch of treacherous conspirators whose goal is to bring the country down" (*Republic*, 130). General Alwany repeatedly uses the accusation of foreignness to further discredit the revolutionaries; insisting that the protestors are agents of foreign interests and governments—invariably the United States and Israel, among others—the general cultivates precisely the environment Aswany maintains is a prerequisite for fostering the dictatorship syndrome in any cultural context.

Similarly, Aswany's observations about the role of the media in perpetuating the system become palpable in his latest novel. Here reading the novel alongside *The Dictatorship Syndrome* is key to fully fleshing out the author's political philosophy. In his political manifesto, Aswany relies on the example of the Nasser-era Egyptian liberal journalist Ihsan 'Abd al-Quddus to present a cautionary tale: even otherwise respected journalistic figures can easily be tamed by authoritarian leadership, ultimately producing propaganda in its service.⁶ Further, a co-opted media serves as precisely the vehicle to disseminate conspiracy theories, offering a broader atmosphere of disinformation, in which the dictator becomes the sole and ultimate arbiter of truth. These dual phenomena—conspiracy theory and propaganda—serve to create a permanent state of disinformation in dictatorial regimes; Aswany astutely argues that subjugating both the conspiracy theories on which such regimes rely and the media campaigns that undergird them is the missing link to overcoming the dictatorship syndrome.⁷

Studies Quarterly 32, no. 1 (2010): 28–46; Lori Allen, "Sincerity, Hypocrisy, and Conspiracy Theory in the Occupied Palestinian Territory," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 48, no. 4 (2016): 701–20; and Benjamin Koerber, *Conspiracy in Modern Egyptian Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018).

⁶ For more on the legacy of Ihsan 'Abd al-Quddus, see Daanish Faruqi and Dalia F. Fahmy, "Egyptian Liberals, from Revolution to Counterrevolution," and Ahmed Abdel Meguid and Daanish Faruqi, "The Truncated Debate: Egyptian Liberals, Islamists, and Ideological Statism," in Fahmy and Faruqi, *Egypt and the Contradictions of Liberalism*, 17, 263–64.

⁷ For more on disinformation in Middle East dictatorships, see Lisa Wedeen, *Authoritarian Apprehensions: Ideology, Judgment, and Mourning in Syria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 77–105.

In his novel, Aswany offers the example of the conniving Nourhan as a case in point. In line with her coquettish romantic commitments, jumping from suitor to suitor in rapid succession, Nourhan proves just as fickle in her professional and journalistic endeavors. Following the ouster of President Hosni Mubarak, in coordination with both General Alwany and her final love interest, Hagg Shanawany, Nourhan becomes the major broadcaster for the new television station Authentic Egypt (Masr al-Asila), a project solely tasked with spreading disinformation about the uprising and its aims. Eschewing any idea of journalistic integrity or objectivity, Nourhan plainly admits that her goal in working with this channel “would be to expose the conspiracy, so that every Egyptian understands that they have been duped and that they committed a terrible crime when they allowed President Mubarak to step aside” (*Republic*, 223–24). Her daily show, “With Nourhan,” enjoys stellar ratings, as she wields the imprimatur of academic and intellectual experts to demonstrate to the Egyptian people that their alleged revolution was the handiwork of the CIA and the Israeli Mossad. True to form, she regularly bolsters her credibility to her audience by placating emotion, coming close to tears in her broadcasts.

Nourhan’s wanton abandonment of journalistic integrity is emblematic of the state of Egyptian journalism in the postrevolutionary moment. As Mohamad Elmasry has astutely pointed out, the highest echelons of the Egyptian media built up a contrived narrative of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood being fundamentally disloyal to Egypt, a narrative that helped enable the ouster of Brotherhood-affiliated President Mohammad Morsi by military coup in 2013. The lack of journalistic professionalism in the Egyptian press, coupled with government censorship, proved a fertile environment for the Egyptian media to become a mouthpiece for conspiracy. Indeed, as Elmasry documents, the Egyptian press in the leadup to the 2013 coup employed the same kinds of ungrounded assertions of foreign infiltration that General Alwany asserts in Aswany’s novelistic rendition of the revolution.⁸

The observations in Aswany’s manifesto, reflected in his novel, are so far admirable, and offer lessons that extend well beyond dictatorship in Egypt. Yet a more careful reading of Aswany’s writings, particularly on the putative threat of political Islam, reveal a regrettable series of double-standards that render it difficult to read his reflections on dictatorship as altogether consistent. We see the seeds for his blindness in the seventh chapter of *Dictatorship*, which deals with dictatorship and terrorism: a chapter that at face value seems somewhat misplaced with the rest of the book. And those same blind spots become fully manifest in his novel.

Drawing a parallel between religious conviction and dictatorship, Aswany claims both are united by an exclusive appeal to emotion, rather than to intellect. And on that basis, both presuppose a singular monopoly on the truth. From there, he attempts to offer a distinction between the politically neutral “Muslim” and the more insidious “Islamist,” the latter of whom is the bedfellow of dictatorship par excellence. Yet as he weaves his parallel, Aswany relies on a defensive posturing not only of Islamists, but of Islamic history more broadly, that is so caricatured and alarmist that it almost loses his reader, whom only pages earlier the author has cautioned against the willful adoption of conspiratorial thinking. Chastising Islamists for indoctrinating their followers with a falsified version of history, Aswany moves on to dismiss the totality of Muslim rulers throughout history as having been “simply tyrants who perpetrated injustice, plundered, and killed,” relying on incidents from the Umayyad, Abbasid, and Ottoman empires to make his case (*Dictatorship*, 95–97). To be clear, there is no historian of those empires worth their salt who would question the blood spilled by those empires, or by Islamic civilization more broadly. Nor is sexual licentiousness under the Abbasids much of a secret at this point. Yet Aswany offers this alarmist reading of Islamic history in effect to draw a stark juxtaposition between political Islamists on the one hand and fascist dictatorships on the other.

⁸ See Mohamad Elmasry, “Myth or Reality? The Discursive Construction of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt,” in Fahmy and Faruqi, *Egypt and the Contradictions of Liberalism*, 175–98.

In this context, Aswany's broader writings about Islamists can be better understood as part of an established pattern, in which his paranoia about the threat of political Islam makes him more than comfortable suspending his own judgment about both the dictatorship syndrome and the tools it employs to further its agenda. Conspiracy theory and media disinformation campaigns no longer appear insidious, as long as they are directed against Islamists rather than dictators of a different persuasion.

Aswany's latest novel reveals that his blind spots about Islam and Islamic civilization remain manifest in his reading of the Egyptian revolution. He opens the novel introducing General Alwany as a devoutly religious Muslim who makes painstaking efforts to ensure that his private life follows the full letter of Islamic law. But he does so specifically to lampoon that alleged piety, by juxtaposing it with the general's morning routine of supervising the barbaric torture of political dissidents. Similarly, Alwany offers pushback to his daughter Danya's concerns about the Egyptian state's torture of Khaled Sa'id by reiterating that Islam permits torture for the sake of societal stability. Religious piety is woven into Aswany's characters in diametric opposition to the social justice impulses that inspired the uprising.

This phenomenon is best exemplified in the character of Sheikh Shamel. A self-taught televangelist beloved by General Alwany, Sheikh Shamel relies on his patron's vocabulary of conspiracy as a pillar of his proselytizing. Warning his millions of devout followers that Islam is under existential attack by the agents of secularism and Zionism, he encourages them to return to the full letter of Islamic law, in belief and practice. Yet his placations to modesty, particularly for women, are cleverly juxtaposed with his own appetite for luxuries; even as the man of God insists on simplicity for his coreligionists, he sees no objection to indulging in exotic cars, facilitated through special deals from his disciples. Similarly, even as he preaches demureness, the shaykh is quite comfortable exerting his own sexuality, having (lawfully) taken the virginity of twenty-three young girls. Aswany intricately constructs his character as a demonstrable charlatan, yet one who has successfully duped millions of believing Egyptians into maintaining or returning to spiritual docility.

That docility, moreover, extends to Sheikh Shamel's politics. In line with General Alwany, Shamel quickly dismisses the Egyptian revolution as a foreign conspiracy; he maintains that Muslim subjects are legally bound to obey their ruler, limiting themselves to offering him understated counsel (*naṣīḥa*). His disgust for the uprising and its ambitions is so intense that it even pushes him to contravene the dictates of Islamic law; relying on a state of emergency, he deems that the exigencies of war require making the forbidden permissible. True to his commitment to conspiracy theory, on that basis he grants Nourhan the explicit religious imprimatur to spread false news and disinformation over her new antirevolutionary television program. In the figure of the Islamic scholar, Aswany conjoins the two major pillars of the dictatorship syndrome—conspiracy theory and media manipulation.

To be fair, Aswany's character has ample precedent, both in the context of the Egyptian revolution and in the Arab Spring protests more broadly. In fact, Sheikh Shamel is likely based (loosely) on the cleric 'Ali Gum'a, previously the Grand Mufti of Egypt, who offered religious pushback to the aims of the 2011 protests, only to offer powerful religious ammunition to justify the military coup of July 2013.⁹ Islamic scholars admittedly can and historically often have been the bedfellows of their extant regimes.¹⁰ Yet even in 2011 Egypt there

⁹ For more on 'Ali Gum'a's role in the Egyptian coup of 2013, see David H. Warren, "Cleansing the Nation of the 'Dogs of Hell': 'Ali Jum'a's Nationalist Legal Reasoning in Support of the 2013 Egyptian Coup and Its Bloody Aftermath," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 49, no. 3 (2017): 457–77.

¹⁰ Several scholarly works have attempted to address the role of the Islamic scholarly class in the Arab Spring. See Ebrahim Moosa, "Political Theology in the Aftermath of the Arab Spring: Returning to the Ethical," in Charles Villa-Vicencio, Erik Doxtader, and Ebrahim Moosa, eds., *The African Renaissance and the Afro-Arab Spring: A Season of Rebirth?* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2015), 101–19; Adnan A. Zulfiqar, "Revolutionary Islamic Jurisprudence: A Restatement of the Arab Spring," *New York University Journal of International Law and Politics* 49 (2016): 443–97; and Usaama al-Azami, *Islam and the Arab Revolutions: The Ulama between Democracy and Autocracy* (London: Hurst, 2021).

also were revolutionary elements among the Islamic religious scholarly class. The fallen Azhari Shaykh ‘Imad ‘Iffat is a case in point. A traditionally trained Muslim scholar, untarnished by affiliations to Aswany’s nemeses in the Muslim Brotherhood, Shaykh ‘Imad used his position bravely as a platform for social justice. Despite being a formal part of the Egyptian state apparatus (like General Alwany), Shaykh ‘Imad used that same platform to join the demonstrators in Tahrir Square: “During the day, he would continue his work, as an ‘alim that was part of the official state apparatus. And at night, he went to Tahrir Square, and called for accountability of that same state apparatus. He saw no contradiction in that—but he did so on the basis of principle.”¹¹ And precisely owing to those commitments, he found himself targeted by the Egyptian security apparatus, which by some accounts outright killed him and by others remained complicit in allowing him to catch crossfire during the protests.¹²

That same commitment to principle, moreover, can be seen elsewhere in the Islamic religious scholarly class facing upheaval, notably in Syria. Although most of the Syrian religious establishment indeed stood behind the regime of Bashar al-Assad, relying on the same legal arguments as the likes of ‘Ali Gum‘a and his doppelganger Sheikh Shamel, the famed Damascene sufi scholar Muhammad Abu al-Huda al-Yaqubi broke that mold. Relying on his status as one of the most distinguished traditionally trained religious scholars in Syria, Shaykh Yaqubi issued a religious ruling (fatwa) in support of the uprising in July 2011. That edict transformed him into a major leader of the Syrian rebellion in exile, guiding sufi-affiliated rebels on the battlefield.¹³ Just as Shaykh ‘Imad in Egypt, Shaykh Yaqubi saw no contradiction between his role as a religious scholar and his support for rebellion; both were guided by principle.

Yet Aswany’s treatment of Islam, both in his political exposé on the dictatorship syndrome and in his narrative rendition of the Egyptian revolution, offers no room for operating on moral principle. The few instances he offers in which Islam is not outright incompatible with the vocabulary of social justice are explicitly presented as exceptions. For example, in *Republic* he relies on the activist Khaled Madany, who astutely dismisses Sheikh Shamel as a huckster and businessman rather than a true scholar, to offer reflections on deeper Islamic principles. Speaking to Danya, who at that point remains a committed follower of Sheikh Shamel, Khaled reminds his interlocutor that “Islam has to be understood as consisting of general humane principles—justice, equality, freedom” (78)¹⁴. Yet Khaled’s character is presented throughout the novel as motivated primarily through the prism of class; his commitments to social justice are presented as a product of his socialism rather than his Islamic convictions. Aswany’s other fictional characters, to the extent that they are remotely committed to Islam, are simultaneously presented as wholly lacking in moral principle.

Aswany’s astute observations about the threat of the dictatorship syndrome, even in his narrative rendition of the revolution, are conveniently paused when it comes to the question of Islam. Again, this myopia of the illustrious novelist has been documented, particularly during the period between 2011 and 2013.¹⁵ Yet even beyond that period, Aswany remains committed to the same beliefs. This blindness about Islam is part of a much more insidious

¹¹ H. A. Hellyer, “Shaykh Emad Effat—Shaykh of the Revolution, Martyr of al-Azhar,” Seekers Guidance, 16 December 2018, <https://seekersguidance.org/articles/general-artices/shaykh-emad-effat-revolution-martyr-alazhar>.

¹² Effat was killed during protests on December 16, 2011. See Yasmine El Rashidi, “Egypt: The Mayhem,” *New York Review of Books*, <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2012/01/04/egypt-mayhem>.

¹³ For more on Shaykh Yaqubi’s sufi revolution in Syria, see Daanish Faruqi, “Politicized Muslim Sainthood in Diaspora: Sufi Networks from Colonial North Africa to the 2011 Syrian Uprising” (PhD diss., Duke University, 2021).

¹⁴ One could argue here that Khaled is invoking the very specialized legal discourse of the Higher Objectives of Islamic Law (*maqasid al-shari‘ah*), which attempts to construct Islamic law on broader principles rather than the technical letter of the law. See, for instance, Jasser Auda, *Maqasid al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law: a Systems Approach* (London: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2008); Nour-Eddine Qaouar, *Le Conseil supérieur des Oulémas et la fonction de conformité à leurs avis en finance participative* (Casablanca: Dar al-Tamwil, 2021).

¹⁵ See Gordon, “Egypt’s New Liberal Crisis.”

phenomenon rooted in the Egyptian liberal project, which from its inception has willingly embraced authoritarianism to reduce the putative threat of religion in public life.¹⁶

That authoritarian proclivity has continued to endure in Aswany's latest writings. Nearly a decade following the 2013 military coup in Egypt, Aswany does not appear to have learned any formative lessons from the tragic mistakes of that period.¹⁷ Banning of his novel in Egypt does make clear that he has offended the current establishment with his broader critiques of military dictatorship. In light of this, I opened this essay by considering the possibility that the good doctor had matured in his thinking. Yet Aswany's continued myopia on the issue of Islam, which was the primary impetus for his backing of the 2013 coup, makes clear that his political thinking has only matured on a superficial level. In both his political commentary and his narrative renditions, he stands against the constitutive elements of the dictatorship syndrome only when it is convenient or expedient. In actuality, defeating the dictatorship syndrome in Egypt and elsewhere requires intellectual, and ultimately moral, consistency. One must look beyond Alaa Al Aswany's political philosophy to find that consistency, or hope for Egyptian social justice in the current era more broadly.

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¹⁶ See Abdel Meguid and Faruqi, "The Truncated Debate."

¹⁷ To date, Aswany has not disavowed his support for either the military coup of 2013 or the massacre in Rab'a al-ʿAdawiyya Square in August 2013.

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