

Maher Hamoud, *The Political Economy of Egyptian Media: Business and Military Elite Power and Communication after 2011*. London: I. B. Tauris (hb £85 – 978 0 7556 4307 3; pb £28.99 – 978 0 7556 4311 0). 2023, 220 pp.

In one infamous video leak, then defence minister Abdel Fattah el-Sisi was listening to complaints from his mid- and senior-ranking officers in a closed meeting a few months before the July 2013 military coup. One officer bitterly spoke of how the army had long been shielded from public criticism in the media, but the 2011 revolution changed everything. Sisi quickly assured his officers that he was working on creating ‘media arms’ to bring the situation under control, but warned him this would take some time. His remarks reflected much interest in details, as minute as admitting that he chose the official military spokesperson to be ‘good-looking’ to ‘attract women’. In the following years, Sisi and the repressive apparatus worked methodically to bring the entire media establishment under their control, micromanaging the news industry, drama productions and advertisements to ensure their ideological domination over society.

Maher Hamoud, a veteran Egyptian economist, journalist and editor, takes us on a comprehensive journey to explain how Sisi’s military regime extended its grip on thought production in the country. In his book, he argues that maintaining the hegemonic dominance of the country’s military and business elites has required an aggressive pursuit of ownership and management of the different sectors of the private ideological apparatus, most importantly following the 2011 revolution and the ensuing 2013 coup.

Guided by a theoretical framework of critical political economy, Hamoud’s meticulous analysis, drawing on his extensive experience in the media industry, provides a wealth of valuable insights and sources. He interviews journalists, editors, writers and other key figures in the industry, offering a comprehensive understanding of the situation.

He investigates the rise of the private media industry under former president Hosni Mubarak and its connection to the rearrangement of power relations among Egyptian elites amid neoliberal transformation, which empowered a new clique of businessmen clustered around the autocrat’s son, Gamal. These media ventures were part of a larger dynamic of interest mediation between those businessmen and the traditional state powerholders.

The eruption of the 2011 uprising saw the military re-intervening strongly in the political scene. Generals such as Sisi and the relatively younger generation of officers on the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces saw Mubarak as too lenient. They blamed the ‘lawless’ media establishment for what they saw as an existential crisis that would have brought down the state. Hence, they immediately set to work in 2011 to impose their control.

Although Sisi once publicly remarked that ‘Nasser was lucky because he was speaking while the media was on his side’, the modus operandi of the post-2013 regime radically differed when it came to managing the press and entertainment industries. While under Nasser’s successors the state continued to own the majority of media

outlets, it mostly outsourced the control of public discourse to different players, institutions, heavyweight editors and journalists who understood the red lines and the regime's goals. The state's direct interventions were not regular and explicit, except for certain subjects, such as the president and his family.

However, the plethora of private media outlets was not 'nationalized' per se under Sisi. Instead, the General Intelligence Service (GIS) launched a 'private' company, which extended its monopoly over media and entertainment. Media and entertainment organizations are nominally 'private', yet they are micromanaged by a clique of GIS officers who explicitly instruct the editors via WhatsApp on what to cover, what to write, and how to frame their stories. The result is dozens of newspapers, websites, radio channels and TV stations with identical headlines and reports. This is coupled with a severe erosion of the freedom of expression, continuous crackdowns, and arrests of journalists and social media users.

A short review does not do the book justice since it includes troves of information. Still, there is one thing I may disagree with Hamoud about: his tendency to not distinguish between the components of the repressive apparatus. He lumps together, for example, the GIS and the army under one category: the military. Although both institutions share personnel and are tasked with overlapping mandates, it is still important to distinguish the two, since, historically, they cultivated rivalry, part of the post-1952 regimes' coup-proofing strategy, even though they increasingly worked in unison after Sisi consolidated his regime to ensure that the threat of popular unrest was eradicated. And it is the GIS that has been playing the central role in reorganizing and managing the media and entertainment sectors at present, not the military.

Hossam el-Hamalawy

Journalist and scholar-activist, Germany

Email: [hossam@arabawy.org](mailto:hossam@arabawy.org)

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Rania M. Mahmoud, *Female Voices and Egyptian Independence: Marginalized Women in Egyptian and British Fiction*. London: I. B. Tauris (hb £85 – 978 0 7556 5104 7). 2024, 192 pp.

This book provides an analysis of four Bildungsroman novels by two Egyptian and two British authors. In addition to presenting unique and valuable analyses of each novel – *Mountolive* (1958) by Lawrence Durrell, *al-Sukkariyya* (1957) by Naguib Mahfouz, *The Guns of El Kebir* (2007) by John Wilcox, and *Wahat al-ghurub* (2009) by Bahaa Taher – the book demonstrates the significance of examining these four novels collectively in its Introduction and Conclusion.

In the modernization process of Egypt, patriarchy, social stratification and centralization are significant areas of focus that have been extensively studied by