

objects to life to tell the story of how Beirut's middle class identified themselves as modern (yet *oriental*) citizens and students of the *nahda* (cultural renaissance), whose discerning taste, displayed within their homes, set them apart from the opulence of the upper classes as much as it did from western influences.

Though the book could benefit from more images and maps, especially in the discussion of the expansion of Beirut's souks and khans in the late nineteenth century, this book makes a valuable contribution to the field of Middle East studies and would be of interest to students and scholars of material culture, social history, cultural history, and urban history as well as to those interested in the globalization of cities. ✂

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**ZEINAB ABUL-MAGD.** *Militarizing the Nation: The Army, Business, and Revolution in Egypt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017). Pp. 336. \$60.00 cloth. ISBN 9780231170628.

*Militarizing the Nation* is an overdue glimpse into the tight formation of praetorian guards who have long shielded the Egyptian army from public scrutiny. Instead of relying on anecdotes, recitations of military-produced commodities (pasta, bread), properties (apartments, hotels), and caricatures (abused orderlies in comic films), the diverse sources for the book serve to correct the limits of past research that tended to mask the extent to which the army has maintained its “omnipotent presence,” reinventing itself when compelled, and constructing a national ethos in which “saving the nation was inseparable from militarizing it” (2, 5). Zeinab Abul-Magd masterfully unravels the web that extends from armaments to food staples, from land and property (mis-)management to provincial (mal-)administration, and precarious, often incompetent oversight over Egypt's air and waterways.

Abul-Magd takes a long view, tracing the military's consolidation of state power since the 1952 Free Officers revolution replaced the faltering liberal order with an authoritarian regime in which soldiers occupied “every important position in the state” (36) – a slight overstatement but fundamentally valid. Important transformations emerged during the 1950s-60s, an era of “socialism without socialists” (Ch. 1). Abul-Magd highlights the “conspicuous corruption” (65) of Abd al-Hakim `Amir,

Gamal Abdel Nasser's ultimately disloyal political commissar, who led the army into the twin disasters of the North Yemen Civil War and June 1967 war with Israel. More illuminating, she recounts how military factories effectively operated outside socialist decrees, including labor laws that governed civilian production enterprises. Anwar al-Sadat, who oversaw the professionalization of the army – landing Egypt a partial victory against Israel in October 1973 – also demilitarized his cabinet and slashed the number of military governors-general in the provinces. At the same time, as he began dismantling the public sector he helped lay foundations for the “fundamental rupture” that produced a “new army” led by a new managerial class of “neo-liberal officers” (5).

Sadat's successor, Hosni Mubarak, inherited an army that, in the aftermath of Egypt's peace treaty with Israel, faced irrelevance. Mubarak and his powerful defense chief, 'Abdel-Hamid Abu Ghazala, restored the army's influence by strengthening the Cold War alliance with the West, first in the wake of Iran's 1979 revolution, and later via Egypt's leading role in the 1990-91 regional war versus Iraq. The “Good 1980s” (Ch. 2) were the “golden age of the Egyptian arms industry”; concurrently the army moved into the domestic market to meet (and help feed) the hunger produced by “swelling consumerist needs” (81). By 1983 the army supplied 25 percent of Cairo's daily bread. The Egyptian Authority of Armed Forces built and administered twenty-three military suburbs, plus shopping malls, medical complexes, and semi-private hospitals. Military enterprises were exempt from customs and tariffs. The army also began appropriating land throughout the country. By Mubarak's third decade of rule the “neoliberal officers”, ostensible believers in the free market, exploited it “while being a privileged, nontransparent, and unaccountable player within it” (116).

While much of this history was already known in general outline, Abul-Magd strips the generalities bare, listing the largest conglomerates, and the most impactful legal decrees granting state-approved perks and minimizing civilian oversight. She characterizes a skilled labor force working in military plants as “confused” as to whether they are civilians working for the army or military personnel. Non-skilled workers constitute free labor, conscripted not to defend the state but to fill army coffers. If slaves did not build the pyramids, they have worked in virtual bondage, at least since the 1990s, to support a “Republic of Retired Generals” (Ch. 4) enriched by Mubarak as “invisible, de facto rulers of the country” in an effort to “coup-proof” the regime (154). We know that this gambit ultimately failed; in the process the ex-generals ran the country

into the ground. Abul-Magd insists the “ex-generals were major participants in running Mubarak’s dysfunctional market and were evidently integral contributors to the fallacies of the autocrat’s neoliberalism that eventually collapsed under public rage in 2011” (155). Chapter Four covers a rogue’s gallery of robber barons in khaki who, through incompetence, negligence, and greed, oversaw the “drastic decline in public services in the areas that they controlled” (156).

No wonder, that in the heady days after Mubarak’s fall in early 2011, many Egyptians called for demilitarization of the economy or, at the very least, dismantling the privileges that granted the army unaudited budgets and untaxed business profits. Abul-Magd’s final chapter on the return of the military to unchecked authoritarian rule can only be preliminary. She paves the way for future, detailed study of early opposition to Mubarak’s replacement by the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) and points to the breadth of public advocacy campaigns to remove ex-officers from civilian state offices (“NoMilCivPositions”), to “Boycott SCAF Products” and to proclaim “The Military are Liars” (186, 199).

She is less persuasive in her treatment of the year 2012-13, in which Egypt was ruled by an elected government headed by a president from the ranks of the Muslim Brotherhood. By trying to assert similarities between the Mubarak regime – “one ruling party, a neoliberal economy, and patron-client relations with a select business elite” – and the Brotherhood’s performance during its one year of governance, however troubled (213-14), her description of the success of the generals in reasserting absolute authority and re-positioning themselves as guardians of the nation misses the mark. Despite the state narrative decrying the “year of rule by the [Brotherhood’s] supreme guide” (*hukm al-murshid*), many, albeit quietly, still support the jailed president, Muhammad Mursi, and reject any claims of equivalency between his government and the military.

The state of Egypt’s present is bluntly clear. As a former SCAF member asserted: “Our money does not belong to the state. . . . We will not allow the state to intervene in it. . . . We will fight for our economic enterprises and we will not quit this battle. We will not leave our thirty-year sweat for somebody else to ravage it, and we will not allow anybody to come near the armed forces’ projects” (240). Saving the nation apparently still means owning it. ✂

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