

Egypt: Revolution or Restoration?*

In less than three years – January 2011 to August 2013 – Egypt has experienced two massive uprisings of historically unprecedented scale. The first of these uprisings broke the impasse that had beset Egyptian politics since the defeat of 1967 – especially since the advent of Sadat at the helm of the Egyptian state – and in the process overthrew the Mubarak dictatorship. The second, more recent and even larger uprising, dubbed by some as ‘June 30 Movement’, was essentially pre-emptive, to stop the Muslim Brotherhood (henceforth Ikhwan, the Arabic term) in its tracks as it sought to erect its own one-party autocracy. In both cases, the mass movement achieved with electric speed its most immediate objective: the overthrow of an existing dictatorship in the first case, and undoing of a rising authoritarianism in the other. In both cases, especially in the second uprising, the Egyptian working class played a significant role, despite the fact that it has been beaten down through extreme repression for almost half a century. In both cases, however, the primary beneficiary of the uprisings was a formidable rightwing force. But for the ‘spring of the people’ in 2011, for the most part a secular uprising of the left-liberal forces, the Ikhwan could have never dreamed of forming a government in Egypt so easily. The more recent uprising of June/July 2013, featuring possibly the largest popular demonstration in human history, could put an end to the Ikhwan’s authoritarian outrages only through a military takeover, in effect a coup d’etat, which was itself supported by not only an alliance of the Mubarakists, Nasserists and other liberals but also by very large sections of the popular masses as well as sections of the left.

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For all their spectacular demographic and performative grandeur, neither of these uprisings can be judged ‘revolutionary’ even in the limited sense that the Nasserist Free Officers’ coup of 1952 could be deemed as such. The Nasserists introduced fundamental systemic shifts very swiftly through such measures as abolishing the monarchy as well as feudal privileges, redistributing landholdings, restructuring foreign alignments in an anti-imperialist direction, building a public sector and adopting a whole host of policies that favoured the poorer and lower middle classes. Nothing remotely resembling that has been either promised or projected in 2011 or 2013. Many sectors in these popular mobilizations have certainly set forth such demands in general terms. However, the various groupings that have alternately contested and/or exercised governmental power during these two and a half years, including the one now in place, have had no interest in disturbing the reactionary order of domestic class relations and international alignments that arose some forty years ago after Nasser’s death and with the rise of Sadat who put in place the twin policies of Infitah (‘Open Door’ to imperialist capital) in the domestic economy and alignment with the US/Israeli axis on the one hand, the Gulf monarchies on the other, in foreign relations. All that remained firmly in place, even during the rule of the Pan-Islamist Ikhwan. Most attention has been focused on the issue of ‘democracy’ which is itself

understood narrowly in terms of a stable electoral system.

The Aftermath of 2011

In the long run, the achievement of the 2011 uprising may turn out to have been more substantial and foundational, in the sense that it did overturn the tradition of one-party governments that has been a constant feature in Egyptian politics since the dissolution of the monarchy and which degenerated under Sadat and Mubarak into outright dictatorship in the service of corruption and capital. The overturning of one-party government did add to the quantum of liberal freedoms while principles of a constitutional order and parliamentary elections were upheld, at least formally. However, what succeeded the one-party system in the immediate aftermath of Mubarak’s fall was what one might call a ‘guided democracy’. As the army is overseeing the transition in the present conjuncture of 2013, so did the army supervise the transition in 2011. The Ikhwan rose to electoral power very much in consequence of the way the army had supervised the transition. What the mass movement demanded immediately after Mubarak’s departure was not parliamentary elections – indeed, it demanded that elections be postponed until after the political field had been properly organized for it – but the convening of a constituent assembly that would represent all major political forces in the country, notably the ones who had actually executed the successful rebellion against the dictatorship. A modern, secular, progressive constitution that safeguarded the interests of the working classes, women, religious minorities and other disadvantaged sections of society was a prerequisite for democratic elections. It was also expected that any

genuinely democratic constitution would greatly curtail the privileges of the armed forces. On the other hand, it was also quite obvious that any immediate move to hold elections would inevitably favour the Ikhwan, as the best organized and extremely well-funded political force in the country, and the Mubarkist bourgeoisie which commanded not only wealth and a political machine that had garnered votes in the fake elections conducted by Mubarak himself but was also deeply entrenched in organs of the state, including the judiciary, the civil bureaucracy, and the security agencies.

Having lost Mubarak as their leader, and having to respond to popular pressures for the first time in decades, the Armed Forces saw the opportunity to stage elections that would be contested mainly by the Ikhwan and other Islamists on the one hand, and Mubarakists on the other, as a win-win situation. Militancy of the mass movement could be sapped by getting them excited by the prospect of 'democratic' elections; the Armed Forces could win back their prestige by being seen as the guarantors of electoral democracy; and one of the two forces of the extreme right would then emerge as the new, elected, democratic government. The popular demand for first convening a constituent assembly was therefore rejected and the electoral process was speeded up. In the country as a whole, the Islamists turned out to be the only truly organized force and the two wings of Egyptian Islamism, the Ikhwan and the Salafists, swept the parliamentary elections, capturing, between them almost three-fourths of the parliamentary seats.

The presidential elections turned out to be rather different, though not entirely. First, there was some mild excitement about confrontation between two wings of the Ikhwan itself, represented by Muhammad Mursi who eventually won and Abu al-Fatih, a veteran leader who had left the Ikhwan as late as 2009 and was now contesting the presidency as an independent. The latter represented the 'reform' wing of the Ikhwan who wanted them to be logically consistent in their claim to be 'moderate' and 'constitutional' and wanted to turn the Ikhwan into something like the Turkish AKP of Mr. Erdogan and an Islamic cousin, so to speak, of European Christian Democracy. Mursi, on the other hand, was aligned both with the traditional wing, led by the Supreme Guide, Mohammad Badie, as well

as the neoliberal supplement to the traditional one, led by the billionaire Khayrat al-Shatir, second only to the Supreme Guide. The real surprise of those presidential elections was that in the first round, with so little preparation, Hamdeen Sabbahi, the left-Nasserist candidate, won over 21 per cent as against 25 per cent for Mursi. The Mubarakist was made to win more than Sabbahi, and the latter, seeing an electoral victory of an Army-backed Mubarakist candidate – 'Mubarakism without Mubarak', so to speak – as the main danger at the time, shifted his vote to Morsi against the Mubarakist candidate, as did many of the smaller progressive groups. Morsi herefore won with over 50 per cent of the vote. Even so, the army, with its backers deep in the shade, took almost a week to declare him a winner. He and the Ikhwan had to give extensive guarantees; and, for all we know, the guarantees were given.

Morsi soon announced that he would abide by the Camp David Accords and the consequent Treaty with Israel. He took to addressing Shimon Peres, his Israeli counterpart, in his presidential letters as «my dear friend» and got Hamas to shift from Damascus to Qatar. He negotiated, or took credit for negotiating, a deal between Hamas and Israel that brought an immediate truce between the two parties after a savage bombing spree by the Israelis – a deal in which Egypt, led by Morsi, guaranteed that Hamas will no longer launch any rockets into Israel without any reciprocal guarantee from Israel. There is reason to believe that part of the price that Hamas paid was that Morsi agreed to close most of the tunnels on which the people of Gaza rely for the delivery of essential goods to them. The larger price extracted from Hamas was that it would break its alliance with Syria and Hizbullah.

Morsi took a delegation of 80 businessmen to China, among whom were luminaries of the business elite aligned with Mubarak and his son, Gamal. He closed his embassy, not in Tel Aviv but in Damascus, and called for jihad in Syria. He imposed on Egypt a constitution which safeguarded all the privileges of the Armed Forces but fired some of the generals, appointed new ones, and thought that the new appointees would be loyal to him. The main thing he forgot was that his own real vote was only 25 per cent, that he received the other 25 per cent and therefore became President because

others, mainly Left Nasserists, transferred their vote to him. He forgot that, strictly as a member of the Ikhwan and despite all the financial resources of the Ikhwan, he represented very much a minority of voters and that the vote that gave him the presidency was the vote of an anti-Mubarakist, anti-dictatorial majority. He simply refused to represent all those who made him president and acted essentially as a usurper on behalf of a cultish Ikhwan that no longer knew just where it belonged between a jihadist version of Pan-Islamism and neoliberal version of how servants of empire were to conduct themselves.

We shall soon return to the question of Morsi's performance in the presidency, so shocking that the majority of the Egyptian people seem to have turned against him within a year – and, that too in the midst of a revolutionary crisis. Let us first clarify a few things about the Ikhwan, though.

The Ikhwan: Some Background

The phenomenon of the Egyptian Ikhwan is not widely understood and this is not the place to delve into the intricacies. Some things need to be said, however. First, they are not some old-fashioned, half-crazed, clerical lot. They are socially conservative but their neo-traditionalism is thoroughly modern. Their mass base is, of course, very broad but their cadres are drawn overwhelmingly from the urban, educated, professional and/or mercantile classes. They have been around for some 80 years and had already become a substantial force in Egyptian politics by the 1940s. Since Nasser suppressed them in the next decade, they have been patronized by a variety of the Gulf kingdoms (primarily by Saudi Arabia for decades, then by Qatar more recently) which means that the organization itself has had access to billions of dollars and it counts a whole galaxy of billionaires and millionaires among its central and provincial leaders; countless others have made money either in the Gulf or in businesses inside Egypt. The legendary Khayrat al-Shatir – the recently imprisoned billionaire, second-in-command of the Ikhwan, a close comrade of Mursi – is the most famous of these Rich and Beatific. They are in competition against the Mubarakist bourgeoisie but bourgeois enough themselves, in fact more inclined toward neoliberalism than the statist bourgeoisie of yore – and

certainly more neoliberal than the Armed Forces who control at least 25 per cent (some analysts say 40 per cent) of the Egyptian economy, thanks, precisely, to their association with the state. The IMF would undoubtedly find the Ikhwan more congenial.

Their access to virtually unlimited funds from the Gulf monarchies has meant that they have been able to establish their organization, open fine offices, establish charities, schools, clinics, mosques, marriage halls, local credit facilities etc, in all corners of the country, rural as well as urban. As the neoliberalizing, corrupt, increasingly bankrupt state withdrew from the task of providing basic amenities to the populace, the Ikhwan stepped in, took over some of those functions and, aside from propagating religious piety and social conservatism, also turned large sections of the populace into clients who could then serve, in the fullness of time, as vast pools of vote banks in case they were to fight elections. With the Mubarak regime they had a peculiar relationship of competitive collaboration. Some would be sent to prison from time to time, but also to parliament at other times; and, so long as they refrained from jihadi activities and did not pose a direct threat to Mubarak, they were allowed to expand their bases and institutions in society at large. The Gulf monarchies, whose largesse the Mubarkist bourgeoisie also enjoyed, ensured that much freedom for the Ikhwan.

Pandering to Islamism is an old imperial addiction. The US-Saudi dalliance dates back to Franklin D. Roosevelt. By the time of the Truman Doctrine, political Islamism was already seen as the great bulwark against communism. The first Ikhwan delegates arrived in the White House in days of Eisenhower. When Obama came to Cairo to address the Muslim world in 2009, soon after getting elected as US President, leaders of the Ikhwan were seated in the front row as main recipients of the message: your sort of Islam is good for us. However, that is not the only variety. Between Truman and Obama, all varieties of Islamism have served imperialism well. How else could the US fight the Soviets in Afghanistan except with the aid of various sorts of Islamists; leaders of al Qaeda, initially a CIA creation, came from dissident factions of the Ikhwan. How could the massive uprising in Tunisia, the starting-point of all upheavals in the Arab world in 2011, be

managed so well without the prior patronage of An-Nahda by the British and French intelligence services? And, in Syria today, there is not a single shade of Islamism, from the most 'moderate' to the most jihadist, but starting with the Ikhwan in Hama and Homs, that has not been mobilized – by the Americans and the French, the Turks, Saudis, Qataris, and what have you – to topple the Baathist government, at the cost, already, of over a hundred thousand lives. Essentially, the nefarious love affair between the US and Islamists that fully blossomed in Afghanistan some twenty years ago is bearing its fruit in Syria today.

It is well to remember that virtually every Islamist group, faction, or tendency that is active in the Arab world today, not to speak of many other countries with majority or substantial Muslim populations, especially among the Sunni populations, is either an ally or a branch or an offshoot or a dissident faction of the Ikhwan. The issue of the containment of the political ambitions of the Ikhwan is not a minor or a local issue. Egypt is in the eye of the storm today because it is the primary home. Much else is also at stake.

In the interim: Morsi in Power

Morsicame to the presidency of Egypt not because his party could garner a majority of the votes, not only because other political forces voted for him so as to prevent the Mubarakists from capturing power, but also, and primarily, because he compromised with the army as well as its US and Israeli patrons, and because it was convenient for all concerned to have him form the government and thereby assimilate the mass movement to the capital-o-parliamentary illusion. Domestication of the mass movement was the real issue. How did Morsi execute, or fail to execute, his primary task? Basically, he alienated everyone other than his hardcore Ikhwan constituency. In the process, he broke all his electoral promises and paved the way for his own downfall.

The Ikhwan had promised that they would run no candidates for constituencies reserved for independents, but they contested those seats and garnered some of them. They had promised that they would work for a constitution that would be acceptable to all. Instead they packed constitution-making bodies with their own candidates, ignoring other constituencies – workers, women, the Coptic minorities,

other components of the mass movements – and passed a constitution tailored to their own specifications, pushing it through in a referendum with a mere 30 percent participation in which only a quarter of the voting-age population actually voted in favour of that constitution. He simply ignored the fact that two dozen members of the constitution-making body had resigned in protest and used the opportunity to get a much more Islamist constitution; or that the judiciary had refused to supervise the referendum, thus rendering the exercise legally invalid. The army's prerogatives were preserved nonetheless, which enraged large sections of the population who despised those privileges.

Morsithen invented a legislature for himself by declaring that the ceremonial upper house was the real parliament; he appointed most of its members while only 7 per cent were in fact elected. He lowered retirement age for judges, retired a large number of them and appointed his own men to the judiciary. Coptic school teachers were charged with blasphemy, while prominent members of the mass movement were charged with acts of subversion. Knowing that the Ikhwan were a political minority and that he had won the presidency with the vote of others, he nevertheless proceeded to appoint a cabinet that disregarded the coalition that had elected him and, instead, appointed an almost exclusively Ikhwan cabinet. He ignored the popular demands for an economic policy favourable to the popular classes, and instead tried to please the IMF by promising 'austerity' in government spending, curbing the public sector that still accounted for almost half the national economy, and refusing to put together a policy for stimulating employment. In November 2012, Mursi suddenly announced that he was arrogating supreme legislative authority to himself and that the judiciary had no authority to challenge his executive decrees. Then, equally suddenly, he appointed more than a dozen provincial governors, most of whom were from the Ikhwan, or salafists; one was actually member of al-Gama'a al-Islamiya, heretofore a jihadi outfit.

The list of such arbitrary, authoritarian actions is long. In sum, Morsi acted as if he had an overwhelming mandate to turn Egypt into an Ikhwan-led, quasi-theocratic state. Juan Cole has rightly called the sum

of Morsi's actions 'a creeping coup'. The uprising of 2011 did not really die down at any point, neither during the interim army rule, nor during the electoral process, nor during Morsi's tenure. As Morsi's outrages piled up, larger coalitions began to take shape, at the level of mass discontent as well as among the elite politicians. Morsi's peculiar combination of arrogance and incompetence, and his one-point agenda of ensuring Ikhwan dominance and perfecting single-party rule, accomplished the extraordinary feat of uniting virtually all other forces in society – Mubarakists and Nasserists, the 6 April Movement and the Salafist Nour party, a variety of youth groups, the Coptic Church and the legendary Al-Azhar Seminary, not to speak of a large section of the liberal elite and dozens of smaller political parties – against himself and against the Ikhwan more generally. The great uprising of 30 June came only after several waves of protests, demonstrations and strikes over six months or so. Tamarud (literally 'Mutiny' or 'Rebellion', though often translated in the English media as 'Rebel') which announced its formation on 1 May and is credited with organizing the mass signature campaign against Morsi and with being the central force behind the 30 June mass mobilization, basically provided a point of convergence for all the political forces that had come together against the Ikhwan; the 6 April Movement, for instance, mobilized two million signatures for the Tamarud campaign through its nation-wide network. All kinds of figures have been flying around. Tamarud had called for a mobilization of 16 million people; after the event, it was claimed that 33 million Egyptians, more than a third of the population, participated, while 20 million signatures were claimed for a petition that called for Morsi to resign, the Shura Council to be dissolved and Head of the Constitutional Court to be appointed as Interim President to oversee the drafting of an amended constitution and to hold fresh parliamentary elections. No mechanism exists to verify the numbers, either of actual people participating in the 30 June protests or even the claimed signatures. The proclaimed numbers are undoubtedly an exaggeration, perhaps a very considerable inflation. However, even if one accepts only half that number – say, 16 million protesters on a single day – it still makes the June 30 Movement the largest urban protest in history.

Even as the popularity of Morsi plummeted in the polls from 60 per cent at the beginning of his tenure to mere 19 per cent at the end of one year, and even as the protest wave grew and the country started grinding to a slow halt throughout the month of June, Morsi kept talking of 'conspiracies' and failed to react in a conciliatory fashion. On 23 June, General Abdul Fattah al-Sisi, the military chief and Defence Minister, notified Morsi that he had a week to resolve the crisis. Morsi responded with minor concessions. The protests of 30 June came when that week elapsed. Al-Sisi then issued a 48-hour ultimatum. The game was up.

The 'road map' that al-Sisi and his men announced soon after the military takeover was virtually identical to the Tamarud's charter of demands, suggesting that understandings had been reached some time earlier among the various constituencies that had come together against the Ikhwan's burgeoning authoritarianism and that the coup had been in the making for some time. Saudi Arabia was quick to announce approval of the regime and to offer, together with Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), a package of \$16 billion – outright cash, oil, investments – in supporting finance. The Saudis further announced that they would step in with more aid in case the western countries cut off any of the aid to Egypt.

Israelis launched a diplomatic offensive and unleashed the Israeli lobby in Washington to persuade the Obama Administration not to touch US aid to Egypt. Not that Obama had any such intentions. John Kerry, his Secretary of State, had been in Saudi Arabia and had toured selected countries during the last week of June as the coup was being prepared in Cairo, and his immediate response after the coup was that the Egyptian Army was 'restoring democracy'. A large number of the Ikhwan were arrested in UAE. In a mysterious and still unexplained development, the Emir of Qatar, still in robust health, abdicated in favour of his suave son; it is said that the CIA handed him the marching orders signaling that he had overplayed his hand in supporting the Ikhwan and the Jihadis all across the Middle East, including Syria. It is widely understood that funding to those Jihadis would be curtailed and monies from the Gulf monarchies would now be funnelled mainly to the so-called Free Syrian Army, currently not more than

a phantom, which is nevertheless to be resurrected through this finance, western weapon deliveries and, possibly, fresh waves of recruitment via Jordan. Turkey, ruled today by a 'moderate' version of the Ikhwan which has imprisoned some 400 officers of the secular army, was the only major country in the region raging against the coup in Egypt.

The essential point here is that different forces had – and still have – different agendas. The objective of the peoples' coalitions was to prevent the rise of an Ikhwan dictatorship after the fall of the Mubarakist dictatorship. On a regional plane, Saudis saw an opportunity to settle their scores with Qatar, a chief patron of the Ikhwan in the region in its competition against the Saudis, as well as the Turkish government which is itself a part of the global configuration of the Ikhwan. Morsi was pliant enough in his policies toward the Israelis but, as he began to lose inside Egypt, the Israeli decided to back the Egyptian armed forces which had been cooperating with them for over three decades. The US was perfectly content to appear to be unhappy about the coup, try to bring the Mubarakist and the Ikhwan wings of the Egyptian bourgeoisie to mutual accommodation, and, failing that, just go back to the old clients in the company of the Saudi and the Israelis. The combination of imperialist, Zionist, monarchist forces can work with the Armed Forces as happily as with the Ikhwan. That the aspirations of the mass movement could be thwarted in the very moment of their success has to do with the balance of forces that obtained at a very specific conjuncture, nationally and internally. This ought not to be used to debunk the mass movement itself – even to suggest that there was something 'fascist' about the movement, as some otherwise liberal-left academics have tended to do.

The Triangular Contest

Much reporting in the West, including most of the western Left, proceeds as if Egypt has only two political actors, the Ikhwan and the military, which are then said to represent, respectively, democratic legitimacy (Morsi's selected government) and dictatorship (al-Sisi's 'coup'). Upeavals in Egypt are then seen through this prism of essentially a bi-polar struggle between them. There is a further presumption that Egypt, and Muslim majority countries more generally, are

gripped by a great tussle between varieties of Islamism, the jihadist/Wahabi/takfiri Islam versus 'moderate' Islam, which then quickly leads to a generalized disposition that favours the 'moderate' Ikhwan' as against failed secularism, the 'jihadis' (seen as an entirely different breed), military dictatorship etc: in all this, the Ikhwan come to represent the golden middle, the Third Way. For much of the western left, then, three consequences follow. First, relative underrating of the sheer demographic size of – and varied political outlooks within – the mass movement which is on the side of neither the Ikhwan nor any other kind of authoritarian rule. Second, they view the Ikhwan as the underdog. Third, utter bewilderment at the fact that the western governments which were only recently seen as partisans of the Ikhwan are now reluctant to cut off aid to Egyptian government and armed forces despite the 'coup' against the Ikhwan-led 'democracy'.

Egypt does not have two main political actors, the Military and the Ikhwan, between whom we have to choose, but three – the third being the Mass Movement. The first two, the Military and the Ikhwan, are the only seriously organized political forces capable of contending for power. The third actor, the Mass Movement, is very much larger than either of the other two but, on the whole, highly disorganized. There is undoubtedly a well-organized trade union movement that has been growing impressively for almost a decade now, and which has gained not only in numbers but also in experience and sophistication since January 2011. There are a number of relatively small leftwing parties that include various shades of Marxism, Communism and Trotskyism. The April 6 Movement that arose initially in support of a sustained strike wave among Egyptian workers, absorbing many from the earlier Kifaya movement and some other currents, is a fine example of an independent group that is engaged in upholding a practical connection between mass initiatives and organized protest. There are militant sections among Nasserists, etc., not to speak of autonomous women's groups, student organizations, neighbourhood committees and so on. So, one cannot say that the popular movement is bereft of organizations altogether.

However, the enormous unity of purpose that is achieved time and again in crucial moments of the general uprising has yet not developed mechanisms of enduring organizational structures that can combine concrete forms of popular democratic decision-making with representative organs that can speak for the movement as a whole as events unfold over months and, now, years. Tammarud, for instance, suddenly appeared on the scene, barely two months before the June 30 mobilizations, and occupied centre-stage in the whole process. Where did it get its resources? There are credible reports suggesting that some among the Mubarakist and Nasserist bourgeoisie provided the funds. That may or may not be true but there is reason to be skeptical.

The cult of spontaneity is also rampant, as is the glorification of leaderless movements. Demographic size and militancy of the mass movement can greatly shape the march of events but, in the decisive moments, only the organized forces, either of the Ikhwan or the Military, are capable of contending for state power. During the uprising against Mubarak, the secular Mass Movement made an alliance with the Ikhwan and then, after disorganizing itself, saw the Ikhwan move methodically to capture electoral power. In the more recent preemptive uprising against the growing Ikhwan autocracy, the Mass Movement made an alliance with the Military and was then unable to prevent either the Ikhwan or the Military from using brutal methods.

This configuration can be transformed only when the Mass Movement is able to develop a clear agenda of its own for progressive social transformation, develop institutionalized mechanisms for mobilizing the masses around that agenda, and evolve its own organizational and leadership structures so that it does not become a victim of its own attachment to infinite spontaneity it is not always forced to align itself with one or the other dominant, rightwing force, in a subordinate position. Added to this is a widespread notion of electoral results as something sacrosanct, regardless of the power of money and various other forms of coercion (including outright criminality in some cases) that go into the garnering of votes. That sense of electoral sanctity converges with the Democracy Promotion premises promoted by the US State Department, so that there now prevails a peculiar left-right convergence in which

the left itself seems to speak of democracy in exactly the language of capital-o-parliamentarian high liberalism: the institutional trappings of capitalist states is what 'democracy' has now come to mean. This leads to two alternative consequences. Those who oppose the coup ignore the arbitrary and authoritarian ways of the Ikhwan when in power, underrate the centrality of the mass uprising in recent events, and insist on Morsi's electoral 'legitimacy' – in effect arguing that once the people have done their duty at the ballot box they should go home and passively wait for the next round of elections regardless of how irresponsible the conduct of their elected representative may be. On the other hand, those who support the coup now hope that the Army will ensure a more transparent, better procedure for restoration of that same liberal democracy, albeit under the aegis of a different faction of the ruling class. The new dispensation too shall be judged not so much by its socio-economic content or international alignments but by tenets of liberal electoral systems.

We seem to no longer ask ourselves just what is wrong with the prevailing electoral systems and in what ways would they have to be altered before we can recognize them as 'democratic'. Take, for instance, the idea of the right of recall that arose on the left as far ago as the Paris Commune, i.e., the idea that if the elected representatives of the people break their promises and act against the mandate given to them, the people have a right to recall them regardless of how much or how little of their term they have served. How do you recall your representatives if the constitutional structure allows no such right? The liberal answer is that you must then use the available legal machinery, however irresponsible it may be to that right of recall. The logic of the insurrectionary process that has been at work in Egypt is that you construct a popular will in the streets, for all to see, and bring things to a crisis. Insurrectionary legitimacy in this sense is not the same as liberal legitimacy. The fact that fascists have also used extra-parliamentary methods against liberal governments does not invalidate the right to rebel from the left.

This author is no admirer of the Egyptian generals and the ongoing campaigns in the Egyptian state media to elevate General Al-Sisi to the stature of Nasser

are at least very premature if not altogether absurd. One known fact about al-Sisi is that he served as Egypt's intelligence chief and, in that capacity, worked very closely with intelligence services of Israel, US and Saudi Arabia. That record does not inspire confidence. Our main point is that the use of military force is always a set of concrete contextual questions; what has brought it about? Where is it likely to lead? What are the social forces it represents, nationally and internationally? We should be wary of the democracy/dictatorship discourse as it is framed by liberal imperialism. Confrontations between men like Morsi and al-Sisi ought not be treated as some sort of a morality play. These are deadly games, between well-organized historic blocs, designed to contain the revolutionary possibility in Egypt.

Revolution, Restoration

History is replete with mass upheavals that are characterized by what Antonio Gramsci, the great Italian Marxist, called the 'Revolution/Restoration dynamic'. In other words, they are situations that are objectively revolutionary but the possibility of revolution is swiftly contained through a preemptive counter-revolution, primarily because there is no organized revolutionary force to fight off the preemption. Egypt's misfortune is that the two forces that are organized enough to contend for state power are forces squarely of the Right, even the extreme Right, namely the Ikhwan and the Military establishment and its Mubarakist allies, whereas the largest force, the Mass Movement, is much too disorganized, far

too fragmented, a considerable portion of it far too unhinged, ideologically, to contend for state power and must therefore see others take the power for which the mass movement itself has created the opening. Offensives of the mass movement are therefore constantly reduced to a defensive position wherein the movement gets pushed more and more from the central position to the margins and is unable to accomplish much more than try to influence and pressurize one or the other of two organized forces.

This structural weakness is what makes it possible for the imperialist/zionist/monarchist alliance to retain an initiative in choosing which of the rightwing forces it will support and finance in any given conjuncture. There is a very real possibility that a brutal military dictatorship shall be imposed, or that, if the current government proves too responsive to popular demands, the Ikhwan shall be brought back, in some sort of rightwing parliamentary coalition, after they have offered even more iron-clad guarantees to Israel and the IMF. This is the framework of alternatives which the US/EU/Israeli/Turkish/Saudi combine is likely to pursue. Success of this project in the foreseeable future cannot be ruled out.

However, regardless of the problematics of 'restoration', the long-term consequences of these uprisings shall be no less profound than those of the Revolution of 1919. After some forty years of autocracy and despair, in which struggles were waged constantly but were punctually pushed into localization and defeat, the

majority of Egyptians have risen to take hold of their own history and have seen for themselves what mass action in unity can achieve. Overthrow of two dictatorships in a matter of two and a half years is no minor matter. These are historic gains and must not be overlooked even as we condemn the excessive force used by the Egyptian army and other security agencies, as well as the violence perpetrated, especially against the Coptic minority, by the Ikhwan and sundry Islamists.

Very large sections of the Egyptian masses who have been on the move for almost three years have gained much experience and are still highly vigilant. It seems very unlikely that the current military dispensation can simply restore the status quo ante or devise a plan of stabilization that does not incorporate at least a part of the popular demands. That will depend on future paths that the Mass Movement takes. In any case, none of the dominant actors – the Military, the Ikhwan, the Mubarkist bourgeoisie, the Nasserists – can resolve the underlying socio-economic crises that have produced the mass rebellion. Short of a radical restructuring of domestic class relations and international alignments, there is a real possibility of social breakdown, slow slide into anarchy or even civil war, and a much longer period of dominance by the Armed Forces and other apparatuses of the national security establishment than is envisaged by the more enlightened supporters of the coup.

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One of the major issues this book examines is what the African experience and identity have contributed to the debate on citizenship in the era of globalisation. This volume presents case studies of different African contexts, illustrating the gendered aspects of citizenship as experienced by African men and women. Citizenship carries manifold gendered aspects and given the distinct gender roles and responsibilities, globalisation affects citizenship in different ways. It further examines new forms of citizenship emerging from the current era dominated by a neoliberal focus. This book is not exclusive in terms of theorisation but its focus on African contexts, with an in-depth analysis taking into consideration local culture and practices and their implications for citizenship, provides a good foundation for further scholarly work on gender and citizenship in Africa.

