



# On the State of Egypt: A Novelist's Provocative Reflections

*Alaa Al Aswany , Jonathan Wright (Translator)*

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The bestselling author of *he Yacaoubian Building* and *hicago* turns his attention to current affairs in Egypt. In the novels and short stories of Alaa Al Aswany, characters struggle with class differences, police brutality, poverty, sexual harassment, and political corruption; now, in a new collection of the weekly newspaper columns previously published in Arabic, Al Aswany considers these same issues that torment modern Egyptian society. He has a great deal to say about one of the most pressing questions on everyone's mind: who will be the next president of Egypt, and how will he be elected? He discusses the moral ambiguity of appointed politicians, the suitability of democratic reforms in a Muslim society, and the inherent contradiction in the actions of the religiously observant policeman who tortures or the man who harasses women. Critical, controversial, and straightforward, Al Aswany asks his government to serve the people, and the people to demand what they deserve.

## On the State of Egypt: A Novelist's Provocative Reflections Details

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# From Reader Review On the State of Egypt: A Novelist's Provocative Reflections for online ebook

## Justin Ng says

The author most known for his book 'The Yacoubian Building' writes about the failings of the Egypt Government during the Arab Spring 2011. He provides an in-depth analysis of the rising social and political unrest contributed by various factors, such as the ill-treatment of women, corruption, which leads to the fall of the Mubarak Government. The writer also gives ample elaboration on each factor and consistently prompts the reader to reflect at the end of each chapter with the sentence "Democracy is the solution".

This book is suitable for those who want to know more about the problems Egypt face in term of the economic, political and social aspects. The writer approaches the topic using an argumentative style of writing to convince readers that change is needed for there to be improvements in Egypt as a whole.

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## Claudia says

This was a book that I wouldn't have selected on my own, but it was a book club selection. Initially, I wasn't sure if I would like it. It started out sounding like it might be more of a political commentary involving Issues in an area about which I was not familiar, but as I continued to read I found that it truly to be more of a commentary of civil rights and women's rights. It made me feel very appreciative of the civil rights we enjoy in this country. It was tough to imagine the hardships in Egypt.

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## Yves Gounin says

J'ai adoré les romans de Alaa El Aswany au point de m'inspirer d'eux pour essayer, sans succès, d'en écrire un : au bout de quelques pages j'ai réalisé que ma plume n'égalerait jamais celle de l'auteur de "L'Immeuble Yacoubian" ou de "Chicago" et j'ai capitulé.

Je suis d'autant plus déçu par le chroniqueur dont les éditoriaux publiés depuis 2010 sont traduits chez Actes Sud (par l'ancien consul de France à Alexandrie Gilles Gauthier).

Cette publication est doublement opportuniste. L'éditeur a entendu d'une part joué sur la vague de popularité dont jouit le romancier. Au lendemain des printemps arabes et de la chute de Moubarak, la publication de ces chroniques a d'autre part le mérite de flatter le lecteur occidental ; car Al Aswany est du "bon" côté, de celui qui défend les pauvres d'Egypte, les victimes de la corruption, les femmes obligées de porter le niqab. Il combat la tentative de succession héréditaire ébauchée par Hosni Moubarak en faveur de son fils Gamal. Hélas, les travers du romancier - dont la subtilité n'était pas la qualité première - sont plus flagrants encore à la lecture de ses chroniques. Aussi politiquement correctes soient-elles, ses chroniques forcent le trait, critiquant sans nuance les méchants musulmans dont la foi se réduit au respect des formes et les hommes politiques corrompus qui, ne tenant leur mandat que de la volonté du Raïs, n'exercent pas leurs charges pour le bénéfice des citoyens mais pour la satisfaction de leur maître.

Ses écrits frappent par leur ultra-nationalisme qui dérive fréquemment dans l'antisémitisme voire dans l'antioccidentalisme.

Les 45 chroniques réunies dans ce recueil n'évitent pas l'écueil de la redite : là où le romancier fourbit son

oeuvre, l'éditorialiste reproduit chaque semaine un raisonnement répétitif. Très pertinent dans sa critique des maux qui frappent la société égyptienne, Al Aswany se révèle un politique moins visionnaire : ainsi prend-il fait et cause pour Mohamed El Baradei dont il s'est avéré qu'il ne bénéficiait d'aucun soutien dans le peuple. Vivement son prochain roman !

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## **Wes Pue says**

Well written series of journalistic essays. Somewhat repetitive but very interesting. It is a brave book.

Critique of how extremist views have tainted Islam in Egypt leading some to assert:

- 1) Islam allows only one form, one worldview
- 2) people who don't agree are enemies
- 3) virtue involves about advertising your religious superiority
- 4) religion is about belief, not conduct
- 5) creating a just society is of no importance

The whole is propagated by televangelists for Wahhabi fundamentalism.

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## **???? ????? says**

Revolt In Cairo (On) 21 October 1798  
Anne-Louis Girodet

\* A political book describing the miserable stage Egyptians were living in the five year before the 2011 revolution .

\*\* This book is aiming to highlight Egypt's social-political that led to revolt , thus the Western's can have a clear vision of Egypt's status , and to reduce the vast gap between the West & the Arab world.

\*\*\* It showed how the west treats Egypt ( ally ) & Iran (enemy ) differently ( torture , democracy & fraud election ) to serve the interests of Israel

\*\*\*\* the regime used the Muslim brotherhood as the boogeyman to frighten western countries from democratic solutions

### Book contents:

- 1) Gamal Mubarak as a successive candidate

- 2) Mubarak's health issue
- 3) Fraud Elections
- 4) Brutal force
- 5) Mr. ElBaradei/ Dr Ahmed Zewil as an alternative solutions
- 6) Gaza paying the price, to pass the succession plans ( to please Israel)
- 7) Boycotting fraud elections
- 8) Superficial religions and Wahabism
- 9) Pope Shenouda endorse that Gamal Mubarak inherit the presidency of Egypt
- 10) Dictator solitude
- 11) Sultan's jurist and the phenomenon of new proselytizers
- 12) Sycophantic ministers in despotic regime

### **Quotes from the book**

1. The floodgates of hatred have been opened wide
2. A wave of hatred for Arabs & Muslims is now sweeping the West .
3. Killing is easier when we dehumanize the victim
4. The Egyptian regime has understood that the key to the West's heart is in Israel's hand
5. Egypt has reached rock bottom in the full sense
6. Revolution is not a slogan or a prior objective but a stage a society goes through at a certain moment , when everything becomes liable to ignite
7. Egypt has enough talent & intellectual power to save ten countries together
8. But I do understand that someone who has already lost something cannot then give it away , and someone who is willing to kiss people's hands in public cannot defend anyone's dignity
9. More important than all that is the fact that in his great success ElBaradei has not depend on connection or relatives. He has proved himself by his hard work , his talent & his dedication.
10. In other words, the Egyptian regime spends twice as much as subjugating , detaining & repressing Egyptians as it spends on providing them on healthcare
11. A leader who defends the rights of the nation must always remain on the field of the battle.
12. This story teaches us that all autocratic rulers considers themselves great heroes & live in such state of perpetual self delusion
13. In fact , in my opinion , rigging elections is much more worse than bearing false witness, because bearing false witness deprives an individual or a family of their due whereas rigging elections deprives the whole

nation of its due.

14. The concept of the benevolent dictator, just like the concepts of the noble thief , or the honest whore , is no more than a meaningless fantasy.

15. The prophet Muhammed did not choose a successor because he wanted Muslims to be free to choose their ruler.

16. I have been given authority over you, and I am not best of You. Abu Bakr ElSeddik

17. In a democratic system the president is the servant of the people in the full sense of the word & as soon as he takes office he loses his privacy & his whole is exposed to the World.

18. Lord Milner is said to have lost his way in the streets of Cairo one day and when his driver asked a passerby for directions , the man replied "Tell Englishman to ask Saad Zaghloul Pasha in Paris"

19. We should bear in mind that intellectuals who loose their way always start by despising the people

20. Last year I went to vote in the elections at the sports club I belong to & found crowds of club members who had come on their day off to stand in long lines to elect new board members.

21. Most of these parties are paper puppets on strings held by the regime

22. It seems that the Brotherhood is destined never to learn from its mistakes.

23. " Imagine God forbid, what would have happened if someone less wise than president Mubarak were ruling Egypt. It would have been a disaster. " Mustafa ElFekky

24> Religiosity so prevalent today is superficial and without substance

25. Mubarak regime continues to support Wahabism in order to benefit from the political submissiveness it installs in people's minds.

26. What happened in central Cairo shows that the great collapse has already begun

27. we all have a duty to act to save our country from the bleak future that looms on the horizon

28. Before we urge young men not to harass women, we first have to teach them how to respect women.

29. Islam never required women to cover their faces. Otherwise, if we could not see any part of women's face in the first place , why would God tell us to avert our eyes

30. Before Wahabi ideas started spreading we were less interested in the externals of religion & more religious in the more sense , more just, more honest & more tolerant.

31. Even the prosecutor general, after questioning Aryan Youssef on a charge of throwing a bomb at the prime minister's motorcade, stood up to his desk, shook Aryan's hand & embraced him, saying : " May God protect you my child. You are a patriot who loves Egypt. "

32. Every time they have been tested, Egyptians have passed the test with distinction, but afterward they go back to the substitute's bench
33. The " Three no's Theory " , no job , no marriage , no future.
34. He told me how he asked the only girl he ever loved to forget him because he could not marry her or have her wait for him.
35. Recent Gallup survey found that Egyptians are the most devout people on the face of the earth.
36. Goytisolo turned down a prize worth 150,000\$ because it was incompatible with his moral conscience
37. Because I can no longer withstand being a women on display
38. In the end, the proposal was defeated & copts won one of the greatest battles in modern history by refusing to accept a sectarian privileges under any guise.
39. The Egyptian regime that has failed to protect Copts is the same regime the Coptic Church supports with all its strength.
40. The consequences of courage are never worse than the consequences of fear.
41. In fact they believed , just like the peasant in the story, that they could coexist with the regime, bow down before the oppressor , and then set up their own small safe world for themselves & their children.
42. then the regime's iron grip will be broken & meet the fate it deserves.
43. Gaber Asfour did not feel the slightest embarrassment in taking a prize that a major international writer had rejected in solidarity with the Libyan people against the despotic Gaddafi regime

### **Best Articles**

1. The only way to evict Mr. Batista
2. A surprise dinner with an important person
3. Does rigging elections count as a Major sin
4. Egypt sits on the Substitute's Bench
5. Nora and the National squad
6. Egypt awakened
7. Does subservience protect us from injustice
8. A discussion with a state security officer

### **References mentioned advised to read**

1. Chameleon by checkov
2. Farah Bahlavei

3. ????? ?????? ????? ?????? ? ????? ??? ????

4. the phenomenon of new proselytizers  
????? ?????? ??????

5.memoir of aryan youssef  
?????? ?????? ??? -???? ????? ??? ????? ?????? ??? ?? ????? ??? ?????????

6. Tartuffe, Moliere

7.????? ???????? ?????????? ?? ????? ????

8. ?? ??? ??????

9. ??? ???????? ??????????

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11. ?????? ???????? ??????????

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15. ?? ????

16. ?????? ???

17. ?? ?????? ??????????

18. Albert Camus

19. SartreJP

20. Bertrand Russell

21. Gabriel García Márquez



- 22. saramago
  - 23. Pablo Neruda
  - 24. dostoyevski
  - 25. GOYTISOLO JUAN
  - 26. Wael abbas's blog
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### **Niels Bjerg says**

Some of the stories reminds me of high school writing assignment, barely done. I did not muster to go cover to cover on this. My thought in the middle of the book was, someone told the author to quickly publish after the success of the yacoubian building.

Sadly this does not approach the yacoubian building in neither language or story telling..

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### **Fatemah says**

One thing I enjoyed about this book was the author's sarcasm, besides that there isn't much to say. There are certain aspects I disagree with or think could have been addressed more coherently. One of them is Aswany's utmost belief that with gaining political freedom through the implementation of real democratic bodies, the social problems would undoubtedly be addressed. Most of those currently in Egypt and elsewhere who advocate for "reform" through the channels of voting i.e. democracy forget that economic freedom is intertwined with political freedom. Political freedoms are based on economic aspects more so than anything else and should be acknowledged and addressed as such. Besides that, I enjoyed reading his rants. I enjoyed the personal touch of the book and his obvious anger at the system.

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### **Dawn Bates says**

If you have been following the news recently you will have noticed the huge shift in power from the corrupt government to the people on the streets in both Tunisia and Egypt. If you haven't, then there is probably no point in you reading any further, your head is probably too far up your own backside to ever come out. If on the other hand, you did see the news ;) and you want to know "what on earth happened to make all these protesters come out in such force and with such determination?" then this book is a MUST READ!

Some of you may have heard about the Yacoubian Building or Chicago, also written by Alaa Al Aswany, both great reads if you haven't read those either. This man has a way with words, a profound passion and a mind that inspires, intrigues and interests you at every level. If I was allowed one dinner guest, Alaa Al Aswany would be at the top of my list. I love this man!

Compiled from a series of articles that ran in Egyptian press, how he wasn't arrested and detained as a

political prisoner I have no idea, but none the less, these articles explain what has been happening in Egypt, the dire state the country is in and the 'turn the other cheek' attitude that has allowed it to happen.

He writes in a commanding way that to close the book without having finished an article leaves you wanting more. His common sense approach to life, his intelligence and his moral way of thinking are skills to be admired and replicated.

I have spent the last 15 years of my life learning about the politics in Egypt and other parts of the Middle East, studying the people and the lives they lead. I have come to my own conclusions over the years and have doubted, until reading this book, whether as a 'foreigner' I have understood the situations correctly. Every last insight, every opinion written in this book mirrored my own findings and feelings. My frustrations with the government (lack of) leadership, my passions and wants for each, combined with my love of the Egyptian people are all in this book.

So in short, if you wish to understand the politics of the revolution in Egypt, and those in other countries, this is the best place to start.

And Mr Al Aswany, if you are free for dinner, let me know!

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### **Karla says**

Tanto como cuando cayó Mubarak como ahora que se consumó el golpe de estado contra Mursi este libro es un claro reflejo de lo que es la sociedad egipcia actual. Llegó un cierto momento en el que dije: este hombre me esta leyendo la mente respecto a lo que yo creo que debería ser el islam y que desafortunadamente no es. Si tu eres un interesado en este país debes de leer este libro porque vas a desengañarte y conocer la realidad cruda de Egipto. Y que en cierto modo te sientes identificado con alguna verdades que en mi caso me pegó como mexicana.

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### **Nourin says**

My favorite chapter was noura and the national team, very powerful, broke my heart. Loved this book, learned a lot from it. Alaa al aswany is an inspiration.

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### **Cara says**

This is a basically a collection of op-ed pieces Alaa Al Aswany wrote and published in newspapers at various times during 2009-2010. Some are very insightful, but for the most part it reads like propaganda. The repetitiveness of the entire thing started to wear on me after a while. He literally repeats the same anecdotes over and over again. I found it annoying.

It's also kind of hypocritical to end every essay with "Democracy is the solution" and then support the military coup against the country's democratically elected president just because he belongs to a party you don't like, but that is, in fairness, beyond the scope of this book.

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## **Frederik Wøhlk says**

Hvis man vil vide, hvorfor Egypterne gjorde oprør mod Præsident Mubaraks styre i 2011, er Al-Aswanys bog om Egyptens Tilstand et godt sted at starte. Gennem et udvalg af klummer fra avisen al-Dustur (de fleste fra 2009 og 10) beskriver han nuanceret og i til tider grufulde detaljer det egyptiske samfunds problemer spændende fra manglende demokrati, manglende udfoldelsesmuligheder og korrupsion til kvindehad og religiøst hykleri. Det er al-Aswanys faste overbevisning, at egypterne ikke ville blive ved med at finde sig i dette, og demokratiet ser han som en forudsætning for at løse problemerne.

Al-Aswany hamrer klumme efter klumme sine (gode) pointer fast i læseren, og som en samling af dem kan bogen naturligt nok derfor godt komme til at virke gentagende. Samtidig indbygger han dog variationer i sin argumentation - som baserer sig på både anekdoter, personlige oplevelser, statistik, nyhedsdækning og meget andet - og det gør, at bogen bliver ved med at være læseværdig.

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## **Ryan says**

Solid collection of newspaper articles published by Aswany in Arab newspapers over the last 5 years or so, focusing on the corruption, inequality, police brutality, suppression of political discourse, lack of ministerial accountability to anyone other than the president, and cronyism of the Mubarak regime. He also goes off on some of the blatant contradictions of certain devout Muslims within the administration who follow strict religious tenets but don't seem to apply general moral values in their lives when abusing political dissidents and protestors.

I read this while in Egypt to give me a better understanding of the current political situation, and it certainly served its purpose. However, by halfway through the book, I had well picked up on the repetitive pattern of the 4-page articles that all had a similar conclusion. This book makes a clear argument against autocracy and its particular manifestation in Mubarak's Egypt, and it supports the case for democracy. But read a small random sampling of the ~200 pages, and you can arrive at the main points pretty quickly.

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## **Riet says**

Ik heb dit boek opgepikt in de boekhandel op Schiphol. De "Arabische Lente" was nog in volle gang en ik dacht hier iets van te kunnen leren. Inderdaad, deze verzameling columns geeft een goed inzicht in de redenen van de Egyptische jeugd om hun revolutie vol te houden. Al Aswani is een schrijver met lef. Hij is kennelijk te beroemd om hem op te pakken voor wat hij schrijft. Al deze columns zijn al uitgekomen voor de revolutie. Hij is de schrijver van "the Yacoubian building". een kennelijk heel bekende roman (ook in het Nederlands vertaald) en in Egypte zelf verfilmd. Dat boek zal ik bestellen. Deze verzameling krantencolumns is heel leesbaar en zeer informatief.

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## **Fadillah says**

The revolution of Egypt occurred in 2011 and i was not well versed in it back then . Most of my classmates studied in Egypt back then and has been vocally supporting the revolution. My facebook wall filled with a huge support of Muslims Brotherhood posts and eager to see the candidate from the Islamic party to take over once Mubarak resigned. I am not surprised either given the fact that most of them studied at AL-Azhar University. At that time, however, i was restrained to voice out my own opinion. I always support the ideals of secular government ; away from ambiguity of religion standard and crystal clear implementation of good governance. However, i cant say this lightly. I will be framed as infidel or someone who pushes Islam away and i have no strength to defend myself. Here we are, in 2016, which i am manage to dig and read more to understand the Egypt revolution. Mr Alaa writing it perfectly and even in its own simplicity, one cant turn away from all the facts that he wrote and assembled it in his book. Being an Egyptian himself, he shared his devastation and sadness seeing his own country being harmed by despotism government and corrupt officers and politicians. He lamented of what Egypt used to be and compared it to the current state of Egypt. This is truly powerful and insightful book.

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