history of World War I in the Ottoman Empire. The chapter additionally points out how the Ottoman supply system was disorganized and exacerbated problems. The unexpected endurance of the battles that heightened the burden of the people should have been added to the factors contributed to the Ottoman misery and increased the people’s reaction as the Ottoman statesmen estimated that the war would in short be concluded with a German victory and, thus, did not invest in the supply system. The next chapter, “Wives and Mothers,” provides a gendered perspective with reference to the hardships experienced by Ottoman women when their husbands and sons left them for war. Akın introduces here a widely neglected theme that the war increased the agency of the Ottoman women and compelled them to address the state regarding their sufferings in the absence of their husbands. By this way, female voices became more pronounced in the Ottoman archive.

The final chapter analyzes a most exploited topic and a most tragic byproduct of World War I: “Deportees and Refugees.” The author compares the experiences of both the Armenian deportees and the Muslim refugees of the Eastern Anatolia. However, Akın adds little to the available scholarship when measured against his previous chapters. The chapter repeats dominant approaches in the available scholarship. However, this does not minimize the impact of the book.

When the War Came Home is a remarkable contribution to the available literature, clarifying the realities of the Ottoman people during the war period and “humanizing” it rather than narrating heroic stories of battle. Thus, it is a noteworthy challenge to nationalist narratives of World War I. The book could be used as a textbook particularly for graduate level courses on the history of the Middle East, the Ottoman history of World War I, and social history of World War I and the Middle East. Those who are interested in the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of the post-Ottoman states in the Middle East should consult the book to extend their perspective. All in all, it fills an important gap in the available scholarship.


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Almost seven years since the 2010–11 revolutions, students of the Middle East are still asking why and how the military managed to ride the revolutionary wave and remain relevant in the politics of one of the main countries in the region—Egypt. Zeinab Abul-Magd has attempted to answer this question in her book, which makes an important contribution on the rising influence of the military in Egyptian politics, economy, and society. Drawing on the rich information about the military that became available in the context of the 2011 Arab uprisings, Abul-Magd has written an empirically rich, well-documented book that will serve as an excellent teaching and research tool for those who are interested in learning about the military and its role in politics and society.

The book is divided into five chapters. The first chapter introduces the reader to the three main arguments of the book. First, Abul-Magd argues that the army today has no
resemblance to the military that took power under the Free Officers in postcolonial Egypt. Drawing on the memoirs of ex-generals and former presidents of Egypt, Abul-Magd shows that the military underwent a radical transformation in the 1980s by engaging directly in the civilian sectors of the economy. She further suggests that as Egypt engaged with free market reforms during the 1990s, the military too embraced neoliberalism. She argues that the military was an “integral part” of the neoliberal transformation of Egypt. Most importantly, she argues that unlike the neoliberal capitalists around Mubarak, the military was not solely interested in accumulating profits, but rather had a keen interest in establishing control and surveillance over the nation. In the final chapter of the book, Abul-Magd discusses the post-2011 revolutionary context that allowed the military to consolidate its power and marginalize the Muslim Brotherhood-supported Freedom and Justice Party. She concludes the book by arguing that Egypt cannot expect a demilitarization of its politics anytime in the near future. Grounded in years of fieldwork and interviews conducted in urban parts of Egypt and with former military generals, Militarizing the Nation distinguishes itself from other books on this topic by offering a close study of the ways that the Egyptian military penetrates society.

While the book is rich with new empirical data, its theoretical understanding of the state, neoliberalism, and class remains underdeveloped. Abul-Magd argues that the 1980s provided an important opportunity for the military to turn to civilian economic sectors with the help of the United States and the general context of the Cold War. The beginnings of economic liberalization under Sadat and the increasing geopolitical significance of Egypt vis-à-vis American political and economic interests in the wake of the Iranian revolution enabled the military to begin expanding its influence in the Egyptian economy. Abul-Magd argues that the 1990s and 2000s led to the rise of a class of “neoliberal officers” who benefited from privatization of public sector enterprises. She points out that they were not necessarily ideological supporters of the shift to free market, but they clearly took advantage of it and soon became integral to the process of market reforms.

An important figure in Abul-Magd’s narrative of the neoliberal transformation of the Egyptian military is General Abu-Ghazala, the Minister of Defense who sought to procure technological know-how for the Egyptian military with the goal of making the army into an independent actor in the production of military armaments. While Abul-Magd shows how they made “big money,” she has used broad brushstrokes in painting them as neoliberal actors just like their rivals—the capitalists around Gamal Mubarak. For instance, in Chapter 4 she offers numerous examples of how ex-generals in bureaucratic positions played a significant role in the liberalization of the economy. However, her assertion that these members of the military were “major participants” in the neoliberal restructuring of the Egyptian economy through their occupation of these administrative posts overlooks the nuances in the balance of power that existed between the military and the neoliberal capitalists around Gamal, who were linked to global financial institutions like the World Bank and the IMF. She briefly hints at this imbalance of power (p. 182) yet does not give it the attention it requires. Indeed, as she shows, the military was not always in support of privatization, as noted in an example where the military prevented the privatization of transportation companies through their control of the holding companies; yet she does not discuss this sufficiently. When the military stepped in to take over maritime transport facilities, it was because no private actor stepped up, leaving the military as the only actor with both capital and a desire to run the sector. Contrary to
her claims, the evidence used by Abul-Magd suggests a more complex role for the military in the process of economic liberalization. The role that some of the more prominent figures in the military hierarchy played in stalling the privatization process—acknowledged by Abul-Magd—suggests that the military was not unconditionally neoliberal at this point in time.

Abul-Magd’s account of the military also overstates the power of the military over the Egyptian population. She writes that the military has militarized the nation by penetrating “into urban spaces of all social classes,” thereby establishing an “omnipotent control over docile or rebellious masses” (p. 2). Referring to its totalizing power, she argues that “in reality, [the military] turned the whole society into a big military camp under its constant surveillance” (p. 5), permanent presence, “continuous gaze and, control of everyday life” (p. 2). However, the empirical evidence that Abul-Magd offers tends to contradict this characterization of the military as an all-powerful institution, with the ability to control and closely monitor all Egyptians. In fact, it appears that the military’s ability to maintain hegemony depends on a two-way relationship between the military and the people.

Seriously taking into account the agency of the people would demonstrate that the public support for the military is due to a diversity of factors, including the public’s desire for security in a broader environment of regional instability since the uprisings, the need for subsidized food and other basic goods, and the relatively untarnished reputation of the military especially when contrasted with other powerful factions of the ruling class (such as the neoliberal capitalists around Gamal Mubarak and the Muslim Brotherhood and its political wing, the Freedom and Justice Party) (pp. 187, 190–198). Indeed, Chapter 5 highlights the contentious nature of Egyptian politics that the military reckons with on a daily basis. For instance, Abul-Magd notes that the military has had to address on-going worker protests in military factories, expressing discontent with the presence of their bosses; protests by a new generation of young activists; and ordinary citizens outside of Cairo expressing their anger at provincial governors. Such a materialist assessment of the relationship between the people and the military can resolve what Abul-Magd refers to as “the big mystery” (p. 217).

As she wraps up the book, Abul-Magd asks if Egypt will experience demilitarization anytime soon. Whether Egypt will witness demilitarization depends highly on who would want demilitarization in Egypt. Surely not those benefiting from the military’s services, not those wanting to send their kids to the military academies and schools, which are better funded. In the absence of any other credible force to provide security, have command of the economy, and have the symbolic affective power linked to nationalism, the military will remain in power for the foreseeable future.

The complex case of power relations in Egypt does not lend itself so easily to this relatively underdeveloped (and somewhat problematic) Foucauldian perspective, which tends to skew top-down in the way it overstates the power of elites (in this case the military) and the subjection of non-elites. The relationship between the military and the popular classes hinges on a nationalist developmentalist discourse (which Abul-Magd also acknowledges), but a Foucauldian conception of power often neglects the importance of legitimacy. Indeed, Abul-Magd in her empirical work shows the need for legitimacy but in her theoretical framework does not develop this sufficiently, applying a theory that does not capture the nuances of power, the need for legitimacy, and the various ways that power is contested.
The second outstanding issue pertains to how neoliberalism is applied in relation to the military. Abul-Magd never convincingly explains how the military is “neoliberal.” As she herself acknowledges, the military leadership never subscribed to neoliberal ideology, and they never shared the same economic interests as the group of businessmen associated with Gamal Mubarak, who were clearly supportive of neoliberal economic policies and ideas. The question arises: what are the sources of difference between the pre-revolution neoliberal capitalists associated with Gamal Mubarak, and the military? How these social groups relate to the Egyptian state and to the broader strategies of capital accumulation being practiced in Egypt during the 1990s and 2000? While the book is empirically rich, offering a new window into how the military operates at the level of society and in the economy, the Foucauldian analytical framework and the underdeveloped conception of neoliberalism applied does not adequately explain the military and the tenuous relationship it maintains with other class actors and within the state.


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In Boycott!, Sunaina Maira depicts the origins and development of the US-based Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, and presents a triumphalist account of the movement’s progress to 2018. Her own participation in the movement and interviews with other scholars provides a rich basis for analysis. That said, additional, brief case studies would have better fleshed out the narrative, illustrating important arguments that at times feel more asserted than represented.

Maira has an insider perspective to share. She was involved from the beginning with organizing the US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (USACBI), a counterpart to the original Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI). She offers details about discussions among largely US-based scholars during and after the Israel–Hamas clash in Gaza in 2008–09. Ultimately, these private discussions led to public advocacy and two successful efforts to pass pro-BDS resolutions at professional academic associations, the Association of Asian American Studies, and, more influentially, the American Studies Association.

Popular resistance, as Maira prefers to call it, has a long history in the Palestinian struggle. BDS is therefore contextualized as part of this legacy, not emerging from a vacuum. Building on Mazin Qumsiyeh’s Popular Resistance in Palestine: A History of Hope and Empowerment (London: Pluto Press, 2011), Maira’s book explains that past events like the Arab Revolt (1936–39), the oil shocks (1973–74), and the First Intifada (1987–93) often included elements like boycotts or labor and tax strikes. Whereas in American discourse Palestinians are often stripped down and Orientalized as violent actors, a fuller reading of Palestinian history uncovers a much wider array of tactics and practices that belie the standard caricature. Moreover, on its own terms, BDS engages in theoretical dialogue with many other grassroots mobilizations against racial and state power, including the Montgomery Bus Boycott in Alabama, the fight against apartheid in South Africa,