

Gramsci's 'Southern Question' and Egypt's authoritarian retrenchment: subalternity and the disruption of activist agency

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Gennaro Gervasio & Andrea Teti

Explanations of the authoritarian retrenchment after Egypt's 2011 Revolution invoke either the regime's repressive advantage over 'leaderless' mobilisation and civic activists, or insufficient preparations and radicalism on the part of opposition groups. Both explanations are unsatisfactory. First, because despite being 'reformist', opposition groups' demands were perceived as radical challenges to regimes before, during and after the uprisings. Second, because appeals to regimes' coercive capacity contradict explanations of opponents' rise to prominence before the uprisings: if activists eroded Egypt's authoritarian regime before 2011, what made them unable to continue doing so afterwards? Conversely, if activists' agency was effective before 2011 despite gross imbalances in coercive capacity, then those imbalances alone cannot explain activists' post-revolutionary decline. In short, if activists' agency cannot be denied before Egypt's 'eighteen days', it must be accounted for in their aftermath. To do this, the authors draw on Gramsci's original texts and Italian-language scholarship to develop his neglected notion of *disgregazione*.

More information

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About the Authors

[Gennaro Gervasio](#) is Associate Professor in History of Muslim Countries at Roma Tre University and was previously Director of the Centre of Middle East and North African Studies at Macquarie University. His research spans secularism and Marxism, and the role of intellectuals and social movements in the Arab world, particularly in Egypt. He is author of *al-Harāka al-Mārkiyya fī Misr, 1967–1981 (The Marxist Movement in Egypt, 1967–81)* (2010).

[Andrea Teti](#) is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Salerno (Italy) and Senior Associate Editor of [Middle East Critique](#). Andrea has published widely on democratization and authoritarianism and on EU-Middle East policy, including as lead author of [The Arab Uprisings in Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia](#) (2018) and [Democratization Against Democracy: How EU Policy Fails the Middle East](#) (2020).