

Assiut, Qursaya, Mohamed Mahmoud: Making the Connections

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Mourning has seemed the order of the day in Egypt this week. Just as Egyptians prepared to remember and mourn the protesters who lost their lives at this time last year in the Battle of Mohamed Mahmoud, a train collision in Assiut killed fifty-one children, devastating the country.

At first glance, the deaths at Mohamed Mahmoud would appear to have little in common with those at Assiut. The protesters were killed by security forces as they demonstrated against the military regime then led by Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. The children were killed as the bus they were riding was struck by a train at a railroad crossing — a catastrophe brought about by the negligence of transport officials.



[Graffiti on Mohamed Mahmoud Street. "Put this on because we're going out." Photo by Hossam el-Hamalawy]

But there is a profound unity to these incidents of obscene violence that Egyptians neglect at their peril. Although those immediately responsible for the violence appear to differ from case to case, there is an *attitude* that binds them together. This is an attitude that remained constant from the time of Mubarak through the rule of the SCAF, and persists to this day in the purported "second republic." It is an attitude that authorized the murder of the protesters and enabled the negligence behind the train catastrophe.

The attitude to which I refer is the sense, deeply ingrained in Egyptian governing elites past and present, that the vast majority of Egyptians are not fit to run their country — that they are mere chattel, unworthy of a meaningful say in their own affairs. The attitude sounds distinctly colonial. And notwithstanding the fact that this arrogance of power now drips from the lips of an Islamist rather than a British agent, precious little has changed about the implications. Fundamentally, in the eyes of their rulers, Egyptians remain subjects rather than citizens.

One cannot but ask how much has changed over the past sixty years when Egyptians are still lectured about the virtues of a "technocratic" Cabinet — a Cabinet whose purported technical wisdom will deliver Egypt from whatever the latest crisis happens to be. And what have these technocrats delivered lately? While Egyptians are harassed about wearing warm clothing, huddling together, and taking to bed early to resolve the country's energy crisis, the technocrats cannot resolve perhaps the most basic threat to Egyptians' security: the utterly perilous state of Egypt's transport system.

Indeed, only one day after the Assiut catastrophe, seventeen Egyptians were killed in a road accident in 6th of October City — on the very day, 18 November, that the United Nations had proclaimed the Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims. Such tragedies have now become so common in Egypt that they seem scarcely shocking. One wonders whether the Assiut catastrophe would have attracted so much attention had children not figured so prominently among the victims.

Yet in the face of successive tragedies testifying to the persistent arrogance of Egypt's rulers, I am heartened by the courage of the inhabitants of Qursaya. On 18 November, they stood fast against the military's claim to their island and protested the attempted seizure of their lands by blockading streets in Giza.

Morsy, the military, Mubarak — they all claimed to know what was best for Egyptians. But in Qursaya where they fought for their homes, in Assiut where they ridiculed the prime minister, and in Mohamed Mahmoud where they

confronted the brutality and sadism of the police, Egyptians struck back against such arrogance. And in the face of all the setbacks, all the tragedies, and all the violence that has afflicted Egypt since the revolution, it is this indomitable courage to strike back against the arrogance of power that gives me hope.

The revolution continues.

[This article originally appeared in [Egypt Independent](#).]

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