

GERASIMOS TSOURAPAS, *The Politics of Migration in Modern Egypt: Strategies for Regime Survival in Autocracies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019). Pp. 262. \$100.00 cloth, \$31.99 paper. ISBN 9781108475549.

REVIEWED BY CYRUS SCHAYEGH, Professor of International History and Politics, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva, email: cyrus.schayegh@graduateinstitute.ch



The Politics of Migration in Modern Egypt by Gerasimos Tsourapas is an important and well-written monograph. It relies on manifold sources, including fieldwork conducted in the “precarious environment” (24) of Egypt between 2013–14. Conversing with four secondary literatures – principally that on authoritarianism, especially its durability, as well as rentier states, developmentalism, and mobility (6–10) – the author makes two fundamental points. Social scientists should pay more attention, first, to states’ political, rather than economic, motivations in managing migration, and, second, to non-OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) rather than to OECD countries and emigration. The choice of authoritarian Egypt from Nasser to Mubarak as his case study answers the second lacuna. Specifically, Tsourapas selected Egypt because it is the Arab World’s largest labor exporter – 4,800,000 in 2012, with another 1,700,000 in North America, Europe, and Australia (22). As for the first lacuna, Tsourapas studies three political rationales of emigration policy: repression, co-optation, and legitimacy (10–18). Although Nasser’s regime was extremely restrictive while Sadat/Mubarak’s was very liberal, all pursued the selfsame rationales. While economic reasons mattered, politics were the priority. In the language of political science, regarding the Sadat/Mubarak era, “Economic considerations . . . constitute a necessary, but not sufficient condition to explain Egypt’s permissive labor emigration policy” (161).

Repression, co-optation, and legitimacy all applied at home, while legitimacy also mattered abroad. Tsourapas discusses these two

arenas in separate chapters. Bookended by an introductory first chapter and a sixth chapter that takes the story up to 2011, chapters two and four cover the domestic politics of migration restriction and liberalization, respectively, while chapters three and five discuss migration and external regime legitimation under Nasser and Sadat/Mubarak, respectively.

In chapter two, Tsourapas argues that the domestic political rationales for the stringent emigration restrictions of Nasser's regime were as follows: restriction was meant to boost popular legitimation to co-opt key constituencies by "project[ing] an image of an affluent, self-sufficient state that could afford to take a political stance by not engaging in labor migration with either the First or the Second World" (32). And because Nasser's regime engaged in "high-intensity repression" (44), it preferred to keep its opponents at home, under lock and key, rather than allowing them to leave and organize abroad. Starting in the early 1960s, this policy made rapidly diminishing economic sense regarding the birth rate, de facto under-employment, and the quickly rising state of under-paid, guaranteed state employment. Yet nothing changed; political rationales continued to weigh more heavily in decision-making processes. Similarly, in 1970, following the Six-Day War, Nasser and bureaucrats only *considered* liberalizing emigration (55-57).

As chapter four demonstrates, Sadat shifted quickly, as part of his 1971 "Corrective Revolution" was meant to show that he was his own man. He gained legitimation by simplifying the bureaucracy involved in emigrating—for instance, he ordered migrant counting to stop, a political decision, not bureaucratic incapacity, according to Tsourapas—and by legally liberalizing emigration. This created massive remittance flows, which had certain negative economic effects, including encouraging emigration (93-108). Also, Sadat tried coopting key upper middle and upper class sectors. Liberalizing emigration suited *infitah* (opening), which mainly profited those near and at society's highest strata (115-26). And, adopting a more low-intensity repression than Nasser, Sadat especially allowed leftist critics to leave Egypt (108-15).

Chapter three "Exporting the Free Officers' Revolution: Migration and External Regime Legitimation under Nasser" examines the one serious exception to Nasser's restrictive emigration regime: the state-organized export of experts, most importantly teachers, to other Arab countries and sub-Saharan Africa. In 1953-54, 580 Egyptian teachers worked in Arab countries; in 1963-64, there were 4,615 (68).

Experts were sent on demand to help others develop while showcasing Egypt's advances and representing its leftist Arab nationalism. This chapter may hold the greatest interest to historians of decolonization, education, development, and inter-Arab relations.

Chapter five demonstrates how labor emigration helped legitimate Sadat internationally, especially in the Arab World. Sadat's and Mubarak's regimes fervently promoted labor emigration, calling it Egypt's "duty" (144). Sheer numbers counted most, though experts continued leaving as well. The reason? Starting in 1973, exploding oil prices increased the demand for manual labor in oil-exporting Arab countries, especially Libya, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf. (Palestinians mattered too, often as intellectual laborers, but were less trusted than Egyptians, who were considered more docile; South Asians started arriving in higher numbers only in the 1980s.) Also, by 1982 Iraq, which had been at war with Iran since 1980, increased its import of Egyptian laborers from 7,400 in 1977 to 1.5 million to replace enlisted men (157). All these Egyptian labor migrants mattered—economically and politically. Although Arab states diplomatically, and in some ways economically, punished Egypt for signing the Camp David peace accord with Israel, they could not afford to evict Egyptians. (Sadat had expected this, Tsourapas states, which encouraged him to sign the accord [153].) Moreover, low-level technical Egyptian-Arab negotiations concerning labor migrants in the early to mid-1980s helped prepare the renormalization of Egyptian-Arab relations later that decade (158). Finally, chapter six "Egypt's Road to Revolution" focuses on links between demographic increase and emigration (162–75), "The dubious macroeconomic effects of migration liberalization" (175–88), and "The Egyptian migration crisis and the 2011 revolution" (188–203).

Tsourapas's dual argument is convincing. Political factors weigh more heavily than economic ones in explaining authoritarian Egyptian regimes' emigration policies and their shifts; and these factors were meant to make regimes more durable by improving legitimation, co-optation, and repression. I would ask three initial questions, however. First, I wonder whether the years between the late 1980s and 2011, skimmed in the sixth chapter, may be an exception to the dual argument, and if yes, why? Second, speaking as a historian, I felt Tsourapas—being a political scientist and thus, perhaps, feeling compelled to reassert his argument multiple times—put more emphasis on the *model* and failed to adequately address the question of whether economic factors may sometimes have weighed more than

others, even if they never weighed more than politics (he hints at this on 161). And third, I missed a protracted discussion of the following question: Were the three domestic and international rationales of emigration policy – repression, co-optation, and legitimacy – never in tension with each other?

Last, reading this text raised a number of additional points and further questions, which do not detract from this book's significance but can help us think more on the topic. What non-Egyptian models did the Nasser and the Sadat/Mubarak regimes consider when creating their policy? Especially in the 1960s, did differences in leading Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) states' labor emigration policies – for example, Yugoslavia was quite liberal – affect and/or matter for intra-NAM relations? While Tsourapas occasionally mentions intraregime discord over emigration policy (e.g., 55–57), were there perhaps more tensions? In other words, was the authoritarian regime perhaps less unified than meets the eye? Finally, historians' work on the political rationales behind the migration policies of pre-World War II and wartime states, like Fascist Italy and Imperial Japan, may be brought into fruitful conversation with a work like Tsourapas's text.

To conclude, *The Politics of Migration in Modern Egypt* is a well-crafted, well-documented, and despite a few questions, convincing book. It should appeal to scholars of authoritarianism, labor, migration, and modern Middle Eastern politics.