

2017

## Sonallah Ibrahim's 67

BY IMAN ISSA

Coming across the recently published novel, *67*, by the Egyptian writer Sonallah Ibrahim, I was attached to its title, which references the year 1967. Although I never did, I often thought of titling my own work after a year, with frequent candidates including 2013, 2014, 2016 and, more strangely, 2027. According to its preface, *67* was written in 1968 but, for censorship reasons, it never saw the light of day. In the three decades that followed, Ibrahim refrained from publishing the text for fear of its being instrumentalized by right-wing forces in their attack on the left. Ibrahim's novel, which he claims is faithful to the original draft, is a cold, machine-like rendition of the protagonist's everyday life, which includes descriptions of his meals, conversations and sexual escapades. It reads as a collection of photographs captured by a self-recording camera, one that does not know what to focus on but feels the urgent need to record all that is in view and more. The words of the novel – along with the images they allow for – certainly rest their weight on the title: *67*. However, their poignancy lies in the fact that they do so without claiming the full knowledge of what that title might stand for, nor how much of their weight it can actually hold ●

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