

## REVOLUTION IN BAD TIMES

**B**ACK IN 2011, the Arab uprisings were celebrated as world-changing events that would re-define the spirit of our political times. The astonishing spread of these mass uprisings, followed soon after by the Occupy protests, left observers in little doubt that they were witnessing an unprecedented phenomenon—‘something totally new’, ‘open-ended’, a ‘movement without a name’; revolutions that heralded a novel path to emancipation. According to Alain Badiou, Tahrir Square and all the activities which took place there—fighting, barricading, camping, debating, cooking and caring for the wounded—constituted the ‘communism of movement’; posited as an alternative to the conventional liberal-democratic or authoritarian state, this was a universal concept that heralded a new way of doing politics—a true revolution. For Slavoj Žižek, only these ‘totally new’ political happenings, without hegemonic organizations, charismatic leaderships or party apparatuses, could create what he called the ‘magic of Tahrir’. For Hardt and Negri, the Arab Spring, Europe’s *indignado* protests and Occupy Wall Street expressed the longing of the multitude for a ‘real democracy’, a different kind of polity that might supplant the hopeless liberal variety worn threadbare by corporate capitalism. These movements, in sum, represented the ‘new global revolutions’.<sup>1</sup>

‘New’, certainly; but what does this ‘newness’ tell us about the nature of these political upheavals? What value does it attribute to them? In fact, just as these confident appraisals were being circulated in the US and Europe, the Arab protagonists themselves were anguishing about the fate of their ‘revolutions’, lamenting the dangers of conservative restoration or hijacking by free-riders. Two years after the fall of the dictators in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen, not a great deal had effectively changed in the states’ institutions or the power bases of the old elites. Police, army and judiciary; state-controlled media; business elites and the clientelist networks of the old ruling parties—all remained more or less

intact. The fact that Egypt's provisional military rulers had imposed a ban on strikes and brought more than 12,000 activists before military tribunals suggests that there was something peculiar about the character of these 'revolutions'.

In a sense, these contrasting reactions—lauding and lamenting—reflected the paradoxical reality of the Arab 'revolutions', if we take 'revolution' to mean, minimally, the rapid and radical transformation of a state driven by popular movements from below. The polarities of opinion echo the profound disjunction between two key dimensions of revolution: *movement* and *change*. The celebratory narratives focused predominantly on 'revolution as movement'—on the dramatic episodes of high solidarity and sacrifice, of altruism and common purpose; the *communitas* of Tahrir. The attention here is centred on those extraordinary moments in every revolutionary mobilization when attitudes and behaviour are suddenly transformed: sectarian divisions melt away, gender equality reigns and selfishness diminishes; the popular classes demonstrate a remarkable capacity for innovation in activism, self-organization and democratic decision-making. These outstanding episodes certainly deserve to be highlighted and documented; however, the focus on 'revolution as movement' has served to obscure the peculiar nature of these 'revolutions' in terms of change, with little to say about what happens the day after the dictators abdicate. It may even serve to disguise the paradoxes of these upheavals, shaped by the new political times in which grand visions and emancipatory utopias have given way to fragmentary projects, improvisation and loose horizontal networks.

### *Transformative strategies*

Are we then really living in revolutionary times? In a sense we are. The crisis of Western liberal democracy and the dearth of accountable government in many parts of the world, combined with increasing inequality and a feeling of deprivation affecting large segments of the world population, including skilled and educated layers, subjected to the neoliberal turn, have created a genuine political impasse and heightened the need

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<sup>1</sup> Keith Kahn-Harris, 'Naming the Movement', *Open Democracy*, 22 June 2011; Alain Badiou, 'Tunisia, Egypt: The Universal Reach of Popular Uprisings', available at [www.lacan.com](http://www.lacan.com); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, 'Arabs are democracy's new pioneers', *Guardian*, 24 February 2011; Paul Mason, *Why It's Kicking Off Everywhere: The New Global Revolutions*, London 2012, p. 65.

for drastic change. A decade earlier, David Harvey had pointed to this malaise in arguing that the world needed a *Communist Manifesto* more than ever before.<sup>2</sup> But then as now, a world in need of revolutions does not mean that it has the capacity to generate them, if it lacks the means and vision necessary for a fundamental transformation. In another sense, then, these may not be revolutionary times so much as paradoxical ones, when the possibility of ‘revolution as change’—that is, rapid and radical transformation of the state—has been drastically undermined, while ‘revolution as movement’ is in spectacular supply. The Arab upheavals expressed this anomaly. It is not surprising that their trajectories—barring the cases of Libya and Syria, which assumed the form of revolutionary wars, mediated by foreign military intervention—resemble none of the known pathways for political change: reform, insurrection or implosion. They seem to have a character of their own.

Historically, social and political movements following a reformist strategy usually organize a sustained campaign to exert pressure on the incumbent regime to undertake reforms, using the institutions of the existing state. Relying on its social power—the mobilization of the popular classes—the opposition movement forces the political elite to reform its laws and institutions, often through some kind of negotiated pact. Change happens within the framework of existing political arrangements. The transition to democracy in countries like Brazil and Mexico in the 1980s was of this nature. The leadership of Iran’s Green movement is pursuing a similar reformist path. In this trajectory, the depth and extent of reforms can vary: change may remain superficial, but it can also be profound if it takes the form of cumulative legal, institutional and politico-cultural reforms.

By contrast, the insurrectionary path requires a revolutionary movement, built up over a fairly extended period of time and developing a recognized leadership and organizational structure, along with a blueprint for a new political order. While the incumbent regime deploys its police or military apparatus to resist any change, defections begin to split the governing bloc. The revolutionary camp pushes forward, attracts defectors, forms a shadow government and builds alternative power structures. This challenges the state’s ability to govern its own territory, creating a situation of ‘dual power’ between the regime and the opposition, which

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<sup>2</sup> David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, Edinburgh 2000.

usually possess a charismatic leader in the mould of Lenin, Mao, Castro, Khomeini, Wałęsa or Havel. Where the revolution is successful, the situation of dual power culminates in an insurrectionary battle in which the revolutionary camp takes power by force; it dislodges the old organs of authority and establishes new ones. Here there is a comprehensive overhaul of the state, with new personnel, ideology and an alternative mode of government. The Cuban revolution of 1959, or the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua and the Iranian revolution, both in 1979, exemplify the insurrectionary course. Qaddafi's regime faced a revolutionary insurrection under the leadership of the National Transitional Council which, with NATO backing, eventually advanced from liberated Benghazi to capture Tripoli.

There is a third possibility: that of 'regime implosion'. A revolt may gather momentum through strikes and other forms of civil disobedience, or through revolutionary warfare progressively encircling the capital, so that in the end the regime implodes, collapsing amid disruption, defection and total disorder. In its place, alternative elites hurriedly form new organs of power, often in conditions of confusion and disorder, staffed by people with little experience of public office. Ceaușescu's regime in Romania imploded amid violence and political chaos in 1989; but it was succeeded by a very different political and economic order under the newly established body, the National Salvation Front, led by Ion Iliescu. In both insurrection and implosion, attempts to transform the political system do not operate through the existing state institutions but outside them—in contrast to the reformist path.

### *Sui generis movements*

The Egyptian, Tunisian and Yemeni 'revolutions' bore little resemblance to any of these paths. A first peculiarity to note is their speed. In Egypt and Tunisia, powerful mass uprisings achieved some remarkably swift results: the Tunisians in the course of one month, and the Egyptians in just eighteen days, succeeded in dislodging long-term authoritarian rulers and dismantling a number of institutions associated with them—including their political parties, legislative bodies and a number of ministries—while pledging themselves to policies of constitutional and political reform. These gains were achieved in a manner that was, by relative standards, remarkably civil and peaceful, as well as swift. But these rapid victories—unlike the prolonged revolts in Yemen and Libya,

or those in Bahrain and Syria which are still ongoing—left little time for the oppositions to build their own parallel organs of government, if indeed this had been their intention. Instead, the revolutionaries wanted the regime's institutions—the Egyptian military, for example—to carry out substantial reforms on behalf of the revolution: to modify the constitution, hold elections, guarantee the freedom of political parties and institutionalize democratic government. Here lay a key anomaly of these revolutions: they enjoyed enormous social prestige, but lacked administrative authority; they achieved a remarkable degree of hegemony, but did not actually rule. Thus the incumbent regimes continued more or less intact; there were few new state institutions or novel means of government that could embody the will of the revolution. Insofar as new structures did emerge, they were soon taken over not by revolutionaries but by 'free-riders', those traditionally well-organized political currents whose leaders had largely remained on the sidelines when the struggles against the dictatorships began.

It is true that the Central and Eastern European revolutions of 1989 were also astonishingly swift and, for the most part, non-violent: East Germany's took ten days, Romania's only five. What is more, unlike Egypt, Yemen or even Tunisia, they effected a complete transformation of their national political and economic systems. Notationally, we might explain this by saying that the difference between what the people had—one-party Communist state, command economy—and what they wanted—liberal democracy and market economy—was so radical that the trajectory of change had to be revolutionary; halfway, superficial reforms would easily have been detected and resisted.<sup>3</sup> This was quite unlike the pattern in Egypt or Tunisia, where the demands for 'change', 'freedom' and 'social justice' were so loosely defined that they could even be appropriated by the counter-revolution. In this sense, the Egyptian and Tunisian experiences bore a closer resemblance to Georgia's 'Rose Revolution' of 2003 or Ukraine's 'Orange Revolution' of 2004–05, where in both cases a massive and sustained popular movement brought down the corrupt incumbents. In these instances, the trajectory would, strictly speaking, be more reformist than revolutionary.

Nonetheless, there was a more promising side to the Arab upheavals, a powerful revolutionary drive which made them more thoroughgoing

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<sup>3</sup> In the German case, the imploded state institutions of the GDR could easily be dissolved within the governmental functions of the FRG.

and farther-reaching than the protests in Georgia or Ukraine. In Tunisia and Egypt, the departure of the dictators and their apparatuses of coercion opened up an unprecedented free space for citizens, above all from the popular classes, to reclaim their societies and assert themselves. As in most revolutionary situations, enormous energy was released and an unparalleled sense of renewal transformed the public sphere. Banned political parties emerged from the shadows and new ones were established—at least twelve in Egypt, and over a hundred in Tunisia. Social organizations grew more vocal and remarkable popular initiatives began to emerge. With the threat of persecution lifted, working people fought for their rights; unofficial industrial actions and protests raged. In Tunisia, the existing trade unions took on a more prominent role.

In Egypt, workers pushed for new independent unions; the Workers' Coalition of the 25 January Revolution asserted the principles of the revolution: change, freedom, social justice. Small farmers called for independent syndicates. Cairo's slum dwellers began to build their first autonomous organizations; youth groups fought to upgrade slum settlements, took on civic projects and reclaimed their pride. Students poured onto the streets to demand that the Ministry of Education revise their curricula. New groupings were formed—in Egypt, the Tahrir Revolutionary Front; in Tunisia, the Supreme Body to Realize the Objectives of the Revolution—to exert pressure on the post-revolutionary authorities for meaningful reforms. Of course, these represented levels of popular mobilization specific to these exceptional times. But the extraordinary sense of liberation, the urge for self-realization, the dream of a just social order, in short, the desire for 'all that is new', this was what defined the very spirit of these revolutions. Yet as these mass social layers moved far ahead of their elites, the major anomaly of these revolutions was exposed: the discrepancy between a revolutionary desire for the 'new' and a reformist trajectory that could lead to harbouring the 'old'.

### *Refolutions?*

How, then, are we to make sense of the Arab revolts, two years after the ousting of Mubarak and Ben Ali? Thus far, the monarchies of Jordan and Morocco have opted for minor political reforms; in Morocco, constitutional change allowed the leader of the majority party in the Parliament to form the government. In Syria and Bahrain, protracted battles against the coercive might of the regimes propelled the uprisings to opt for the

insurrectionary path, the outcomes of which remain to be seen. The Libyan regime was overthrown in a violent revolutionary war. But the uprisings in Egypt, Yemen and Tunisia followed a particular trajectory, which can be characterized neither as 'revolution' *per se* nor simply in terms of 'reform' measures. Instead it may make sense to speak of 'refolutions': revolutions that aim to push for reforms in, and through, the institutions of the existing regimes.<sup>4</sup>

As such, 'refolutions' embody paradoxical realities. They possess the advantage of ensuring orderly transitions, avoiding violence, destruction and chaos—the evils that dramatically increase the cost of change; revolutionary excesses, the 'reign of terror' and summary trials can be averted. Yet the possibility of genuine transformation through systematic reforms and social pacts will depend on the perpetual mobilization and vigilance of social organizations—popular layers, civil associations, trade unions, social movements, political parties—exerting constant pressure. Otherwise, 'refolutions' carry the constant danger of counter-revolutionary restoration, precisely because the revolution has not made it into the key institutions of state power. One can imagine powerful interests, wounded by the ferocity of the popular upheavals, desperately seeking to regroup, instigating sabotage and black propaganda. The defeated elites may spread cynicism and fear by invoking 'chaos' and instability, to generate nostalgia for the 'secure times' under the old regime. Former high officials, old party apparatchiks, editors-in-chief, powerful businessmen and aggrieved security and intelligence-service operatives would penetrate the institutions of power and propaganda to turn things to their advantage.

In Yemen, the key elements of the old regime have remained intact, even though a renewed sense of freedom and independent activism promises to compel political reform. Tunisia's old ruling groups and economic mafias are poised to fight back and block the path to genuine change, with a dense network of political factions and business organizations at their disposal. In Egypt the SCAF was responsible for widespread repression, incarcerating large numbers of revolutionaries and shutting

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<sup>4</sup>The term 'refolution' was coined by Timothy Garton Ash in June 1989 to describe the initial rounds of political reform in Poland and Hungary, the result of negotiations between the Communist authorities and the leaderships of the popular movements: Timothy Garton Ash, 'Refolution, the Springtime of Two Nations', *New York Review of Books*, 15 June 1989. Here, I clearly use the term differently.

down critical opposition organizations. The danger of restoration, or of merely superficial change, becomes more serious as the revolutionary fervour subsides, normal life resumes and people grow disenchanted—conditions that have begun to appear on the Arab political scene.

### *Different times*

Why did the Arab uprisings, with the exceptions of those in Libya and Syria, assume this ‘revolutionary’ character? Why did key institutions of the old regime remain unaltered, while revolutionary forces were marginalized? In part this has to do with the very swift downfall of the dictators, which gave the impression that the revolutions had come to an end, achieved their goals, without a substantial shift in the power structure. As we have seen, this rapid ‘victory’ did not leave much opportunity for the movements to establish alternative organs of power, even if they had intended to; in this sense these were self-limiting revolutions. But there was also something else at play: revolutionaries remained outside the structures of power because they were not planning to take over the state; when, in the later stages, they realized that they needed to, they lacked the political resources—organization, leadership, strategic vision—that would be necessary to wrest control both from the old regimes and from ‘free-riders’ such as the Muslim Brothers or the Salafists, who had played a limited role in the uprising but were organizationally ready to take power. A principal difference between the Arab uprisings and their 20th-century predecessors was that they occurred in quite altered ideological times.

Up till the 1990s, three major ideological traditions had been the bearers of ‘revolution’ as a strategy of fundamental change: anti-colonial nationalism, Marxism and Islamism. The first, as reflected in the ideas of Fanon, Sukarno, Nehru, Nasser or Hồ Chí Minh, conceived the post-independence social order as something new, a negation of the political and economic domination of the old colonial system and the ‘comprador’ bourgeoisie. Even though their promises far exceeded their ability to deliver, the post-colonial regimes did make some progress in education, health, land reform and industrialization—measures that were affirmed in national-development pacts: al-Mithaq in Egypt (1962), the Arusha Declaration (1967) and Mwongozo guidelines (1971) in Tanzania. Their major achievements lay in state-building: national administration, infrastructure, class formation. However, because they failed to tackle



fundamental problems of unequal property and wealth distribution, the nationalist governments began to lose their legitimacy. As former anti-colonial revolutionaries turned into administrators of the post-colonial order, they largely failed to deliver on their promises; in many instances nationalist governments devolved into autocracies, were saddled with debt, then pushed into neoliberal structural adjustment programmes, if they had not already been overthrown by military coups or undermined by imperialist intrigues. Today the Palestinian movement is perhaps the last still fighting for national independence.

Marxism was undoubtedly the most formidable revolutionary current of the Cold War era. The Vietnamese and Cuban revolutions inspired a generation of radicals: Che Guevara and Hồ Chí Minh became iconic figures, not only in Asia, Latin America and the Middle East, but also for the student movements in the US, Paris, Rome and Berlin. Guerrilla movements came to symbolize the radicalism of the 1960s. They surged in Africa after Lumumba's assassination and with the hardening of apartheid in South Africa. In the 70s a wave of 'Marxist-Leninist' revolutions overthrew colonial rule in Mozambique, Angola, Guinea-Bissau and elsewhere. Although the *foco* strategy promoted by Guevara did not bear fruit in Latin America, there were successful insurrections in Grenada and Nicaragua towards the end of the 1970s, while El Salvador appeared to be another likely candidate for revolutionary advance. Latin American radicals found a new ally as liberation theology inspired lay Catholics and even members of the clergy to join the struggle. In the Middle East, the National Liberation Front drove the British out of Aden and proclaimed the People's Republic of South Yemen; left-wing guerrillas played a significant role in Iran, Oman and the occupied territories of Palestine. The impact of these revolutionary movements on the intellectual climate of the West was undeniable, helping to detonate the worldwide rebellion of youth, students, workers and intellectuals in 1968. In 1974, the Carnation Revolution overthrew the dictatorship in Portugal. While some Communist Parties in Europe and the developing world took an increasingly reformist ('Euro-communist') course, significant forces within the Marxist-Leninist tradition remained committed to a strategy of revolution.

But the picture shifted dramatically with the collapse of the Soviet bloc. The concept of revolution had been so integral to that of socialism that the demise of 'actually existing socialism', following the anti-Communist

mobilizations in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s and the West's victory in the Cold War, effectively implied the end of 'revolution' and of state-led development as well. *Étatisme* was disparaged as inefficient and repressive, leading to the erosion of personal autonomy and initiative. This had a profound bearing on the notion of revolution, with its focus on state power, now identified with authoritarianism and the failures of the Communist bloc. The advance of neoliberalism, beginning in 1979–80 with the victories of Thatcher and Reagan, later expanding as the dominant ideology across much of the world, played a central role in this change of discourse. In place of 'state' and 'revolution' there was an exponential growth of talk about NGOs, 'civil society', 'public spheres' and so forth—in a word, reform. Gradual change became the only acceptable route to social transformation. Western governments, aid agencies and NGOs promoted this new gospel assiduously. The expansion of the NGO sector in the Arab world and in the global South more generally signified a dramatic shift from social activism, informed by collective interests, to an emphasis on individual self-help in a competitive world. In these neoliberal times, the egalitarian spirit of liberation theology gave way to a global surge of evangelical Christianity, informed by the spirit of individual self-interest and accumulation.

The third tradition was that of revolutionary Islamism, an ideological rival of Marxism which nevertheless bore the imprint of its secular opponent. From the 1970s, militant Islamist movements drew upon the ideas of Sayyid Qutb in their battle against the secular states of the Muslim world; Qutb himself had learned much from the Indian Islamist leader Abul A'la Maududi, who in turn had been impressed by the organizational and political strategy of the Communist Party of India. Qutb's 1964 pamphlet *Milestones*, arguing for a Muslim vanguard to seize the *jahili* state and establish a true Islamic order, became the Islamist equivalent of Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?*, guiding the strategy of militant groups such as Jihad, Gama'a al-Islamiyya, Hizb ut-Tahrir, and Laskar Jihad. A number of former leftists—Adel Hussein, Mustafa Mahmud, Tariq al-Bishri—defected to the Islamist camp, bringing ideas from the Marxist-Leninist tradition with them. The 1979 Iranian revolution was informed both by leftist ideas and Qutb—*Milestones* had been translated by Ayatollah Khamenei, the current Supreme Leader. The Marxist-Leninist Fedayan-e Khalq and the 'Islamic-Marxist' Mojahedin-e-Khalq played a significant role in radicalizing opposition to the Shah's dictatorship. More important, perhaps, was the popular theorist Ali Shariati who, as a student of

the French left-winger Georges Gurvitch, had spoken passionately about ‘revolution’ in a blend of Marxist and religious idioms, invoking a ‘divine classless society’.<sup>5</sup> The concept of revolution had thus been central to militant Islamism, in both its Sunni and Shia forms. This tradition always stood in clear contrast to the strategy of electoral Islamists such as the Muslim Brotherhood, who aspired to build up sufficient social support to capture the state through peaceful means.<sup>6</sup>

But by the early 2000s, militant Islamists’ belief in revolution had also run out of steam. In Iran, for instance, the once-cherished idiom of ‘revolution’ had become associated with destruction and extremism, at least by the time of Mohammad Khatami’s presidential victory in 1997. Islamism—understood as a movement that sees Islam as a comprehensive system, offering solutions to all social, political and economic problems, with a stress on obligations rather than rights—was entering into crisis. Dissenters argued that, in practice, the ‘Islamic state’ promoted by Iran’s hardliners, Pakistan’s Jamaat-e-Islami and Indonesia’s Laskar Jihad, among others, was damaging both to Islam and to the state. The late 90s and early 2000s saw the rise of what I have called post-Islamist trends. These are still religious, not secular, but they aim to transcend Islamist politics by promoting a pious society and a secular state, combining religiosity with rights, to varying degrees. Post-Islamist currents such as Turkey’s AKP, Tunisia’s Nahda Party and Morocco’s Justice and Development Party pursue a reformist path towards political and social change; they are informed by the idioms of the post-Cold War era—‘civil society’, accountability, non-violence and gradualism.<sup>7</sup>

### *Lowered hopes*

The Arab uprisings thus occurred at a time when the decline of key oppositional ideologies—anti-colonial nationalism, Marxist-Leninism and Islamism—had delegitimized the very idea of ‘revolution’. This was a very different era from, say, the late 1970s, when my friends and I in Iran

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<sup>5</sup> Asef Bayat, ‘Shariati and Marx: A Critique of an “Islamic” Critique of Marxism’, *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, no. 10, 1990.

<sup>6</sup> Interestingly al-Qaeda, the most militant and violent of *jihadi* groupings, remained in essence non-revolutionary, due to its multinational form and diffuse aims, such as ‘saving Islam’ or ‘fighting the West’, and the idea of *jihad* as an end in itself. See Faisal Devji, *Landscapes of Jihad*, Ithaca 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Asef Bayat, ed., *Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam*, New York 2013.

would often invoke the notion, even though it seemed far-fetched; cycling through the opulent neighbourhoods of northern Tehran, we speculated about how the Shah's palaces could be taken over and the lavish mansions redistributed. We were thinking in terms of revolution. But in the Middle East of the new millennium, hardly anyone imagined change in these terms; few Arab activists had really strategized for a revolution, even though they might have dreamed about it. In general, the desire was for reform, or meaningful change within the existing political arrangements. In Tunisia, scarcely anyone was thinking about 'revolution'; in fact, under Ben Ali's police state, the intelligentsia had suffered a 'political death', as one told me.<sup>8</sup> In Egypt, Kefaya and the April 6th Movement, despite their innovative tactics, were essentially reformist, in that they did not have a strategy for the overthrow of the state. Some of their activists reportedly received training in the US, Qatar or Serbia, largely in the fields of election monitoring, non-violent protest and network-building. Consequently, what transpired as the uprisings unfolded were not revolutions *per se* but 'refolutions'—that is, revolutionary movements that wished to compel the incumbent regimes to reform themselves.

In truth, people may or may not have an idea about 'revolution' for it to happen; the occurrence of mass uprisings has little to do with any theorizations of them. They cannot be plotted and planned, even though people may plot and plan them. Revolutions 'simply' happen. But having or not having ideas about revolutions does critically influence the outcome when they do occur. The 'refolutionary' character of the Arab uprisings means that, at best, they remain unfinished, since the key institutions and interests of the old regimes—and the free-riders, Muslim Brothers and Salafists—continue to frustrate the demands for meaningful change. This outcome must be painful for all those who hoped for a just and dignified future.

It may be some consolation to recall that most of the great revolutions of the 20th century—Russia, China, Cuba, Iran—that did succeed in toppling the old autocratic regimes rapidly crafted new but equally authoritarian and repressive states. Substantial disruptions in order and administration are another side-effect of radical revolutionary change. Libya, where the Qaddafi regime was violently overthrown, may not be an object of envy for Egyptian or Tunisian militants. The combination

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<sup>8</sup> See also Beatrice Hibou, *The Force of Obedience*, Cambridge 2011.

of Qaddafi's brutality and Western interests in Libyan oil resulted in a violent and destructive, NATO-assisted insurrection which brought an end to the old despotic rule. But the new administration has yet to give rise to a more inclusive and transparent polity. The National Transitional Council remained secretive about the identity of most of its members and its decision-making processes. The internal divisions between Islamists and secularists, its lack of effective authority over various free-floating militia groups and its feeble administrative skills rendered the NTC ill-equipped for government.<sup>9</sup> The country experienced major dislocations—in security, administration and the provision of basic infrastructure—before authority was transferred from the NTC to an elected civilian body.

The point is not to disparage the idea of radical revolutions, for there are many positive aspects to such experiences—a novel sense of liberation, free expression and open-ended possibilities for a better future being among the most obvious. Rather, it is necessary to highlight the fact that the revolutionary overthrow of a repressive regime does not in itself guarantee a more just and inclusive order. Indeed, radical ideological revolutions may carry in themselves the seeds of authoritarian rule, for the overhaul of the state and the elimination of dissent may leave little space for pluralism and broad political competition. By contrast, 'revolution' may create a better environment for the consolidation of electoral democracy because, by definition, it is unable to monopolize state power. Instead, the emergence of multiple power centres—including those of the counter-revolution—can neutralize the excesses of new political elites. Thus Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood and the Tunisian Ennahda party are unlikely to be able to monopolize power in the same way that the Khomeinists did in post-revolutionary Iran, precisely because a range of powerful interests, including those of the old regime, remain active and effective.

It may then be worth considering another understanding of 'revolution', along the lines developed by Raymond Williams in *The Long Revolution*—that is, a process which is 'difficult', in the sense of complex and multifaceted, 'total', meaning not just economic but social and cultural transformation, and 'human', involving the deepest structures

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<sup>9</sup> Ranj Alaaldin, 'Libya: Defining its Future', in Toby Dodge, ed., *After the Arab Spring: Power Shift in the Middle East?*, London 2012.

of relationships and feeling.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, rather than looking for quick results or worrying about set demands, we might view the Arab uprisings as ‘long revolutions’ that may bear fruit in ten or twenty years by establishing new ways of doing things, a new way of thinking about power. Yet at stake are not merely semantic concerns about how to define revolutions, but the hard problems of power structures and entrenched interests. However one characterizes the process—as ‘long revolution’, or as one that begins with the radical transformation of the state—the crucial question is how to ensure a fundamental shift from the old, authoritarian order to inaugurate meaningful democratic change, while eschewing violent coercion and injustice. One thing is certain, however: the journey from the oppressive ‘old’ to the liberatory ‘new’ will not come about without relentless struggles and incessant popular mobilization, in both public and private realms. Indeed, the ‘long revolution’ may have to begin even when the ‘short revolution’ ends.

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<sup>10</sup> Anthony Barnett, ‘We Live in Revolutionary Times, But What Does This Mean?’, *Open Democracy*, 16 December 2011.