

INTRODUCTION

SAÏD AMIR ARJOMAND

Major revolutions are surprising events in world history which force a reexamination of the conventional wisdom that has made them look improbable. As such, they immediately set in motion the search for a new meaning of revolution. This search is indicated by the spread of such symbols and terms as the Arab Spring and the Tahrir Square that serve as an instant paradigm for understanding similar current events elsewhere. Tahrir thus became a symbol for the Occupy Wall Street movement. In England, protesters signposted “Tahrir Square” in the area of their sit-in in front of St. Paul’s Cathedral in London. Even two years later at the time of the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI in February 2013, the new instant paradigm did not fail, in a *New York Times* op-ed (2/28/13), to spur the hope for a Vatican Spring! This book is the response of the sociology of revolution to this universal search for the momentous upheaval of 2011 in the Arab world and its significance in world history.

It is just about possible to do so as we are going to press after the third anniversary of the Arab Spring. The charm of the term, “Arab Spring” was already wearing off fast when the *New York Times* op-ed appeared, and little seemed to be left of it by the end of 2013. In its first 2014 issue, *The Economist* (1/4/14, 35) reported a senior Arab politician as saying that we should drop all pretense and admit that the Arab Spring’s toppling of dictators simply split our flimsy nations into clashing sects and tribes. More

poignantly, its report, entitled “Arab Gloom,” quoted from an open letter by an activist of Egypt’s 2011 revolution to a friend in prison: “I write to you on the last day of this dismal year, when dreams of Egyptians for a civil state that would bring freedom, dignity and social justice turned into nightmares.” But the third anniversary of the Arab Spring did not pass on that sad note alone. *Le Monde* celebrated it with an editorial (1/10/14) on the promise of the Tunisian Model for the transition to democracy in the Muslim world in view of the imminent ratification of a constitution that makes no mentions of the *shari`a*. On the third anniversary of the Arab Spring, a spectrum of its varied outcomes were in fact in full highlight: a successful revolutionary transition to democracy in Tunisia, a law and order counterrevolution celebrated by a national referendum on its constitution in Egypt, deepening chaos caused by revolutionary power struggle in Libya, and a horrendous civil war in Syria. As the year 2014 wore on, the bleak picture of deepening revolutionary anarchy in Libya and of savage bloodshed in disintegrated Syria became predominant, giving currency to the acerbic antonym, the “Arab Winter.” To see all this explained in terms of the general dynamics of revolution and counterrevolution, I urge the reader to proceed with our chapters on the Arab revolution of 2011 and its counterrevolutions that put them in comparative perspective.

The Arab revolution of 2011 suddenly erupted in a region of the world marked by democracy deficit and a plethora of authoritarian regimes with deep police/security states. Since 9/11/2001, these features of the Arab world had been explained by a widely accepted neoconservative thesis in terms of the incompatibility of Islam and democracy. The unmistakably democratic intent of the uprising and the initial absence of Islamist ideology and militancy seriously challenged the prevalent neoconservative view, persuading some observers to reopen the book of history, and others to look for hitherto unappreciated parallels with other near-contemporary revolutionary transformations. The aim of this book is to do so systematically in order to understand the Arab revolution of 2011 in as broad a historical and comparative perspective as possible. Historically, our study begins with the European revolution of 1848, which offers an admirable parallel for the study of revolution across the borders of a world region as well as the dynamics of revolution and reaction or counterrevolution. It then comprises parallels to and differences with the Islamic revolution of 1979 in Iran and the post-1989 color revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe. Our comparative range puts the Arab Spring alongside the “Spring of Peoples”—that is, the spring of 1848 in Europe, and the failed

Boukinabe Spring of 2011 in Burkina Faso. Furthermore, it is daringly projected into the near future with an analytical vision of the centennial of the Russia Revolution in 2017.

The studies in this volume perform the three most important functions of comparative analysis. They assess the world-historical significance the Arab Spring in terms of its causes, its consequences, and its distinctive features. Differences are as important as commonalities for this threefold comparative purpose. Goldstone describes the general character of Arab regimes as authoritarian while differentiating its two variants, and Toscano discuss the general prospects for democracy in the Arab world, while Ersoy underlines the general symbolic and material significance of places in facilitating revolutionary activism. My own chapter and that by Fathi and Karolewski focus on differences within the Arab world as well as the common features of the Arab revolution of 2011 in contrast with other major revolutions in world history. Harris examines social inequality for Middle East and North Africa as a whole in comparison with other world regions. Chapter VIII, by Mathieu Hilgers and Augustin Loada, and chapter X, by Dmitry Ivanov, examine the conditions necessary for revolutions by focusing on differences between the successful Arab revolutions of 2011 and contemporary failed or possible revolutions in other regions of the world.

As this range of comparisons is far broader than in any of the many recent works on the Arab or Middle Eastern revolutions, a few words on the logic of the broad scope of its comparisons may be in order. In his essay on "objective possibilities and adequate causation" (Weber 1949[1905]), Max Weber formulated his idea of "adequate" causation of significant historical events, which represented a compromise between the so-called nomological explanations of the positivists and ideographic narratives of the historians in the German methods debate of the turn of the twentieth century. The entire body of nomological knowledge of empirical regularities in social sciences, he argued, can only serve as the basis of counterfactual conditionals regarding what was possible at the time, other than what actually happened. With the help of this empirical knowledge, we can thus determine, with varying degrees of probability, that a factor or a set of factors present at the time of the significant historical event was its "adequate cause." As history is open-ended, there are always objectively possible alternatives to what actually occurred. This can only be plausibly explained in terms of "adequate causes." Now, comparisons of the type we have in this volume deal with realized possibilities. As such, comparisons of similar cases perform the methodological function of objective possibilities more securely as

actual cases demonstrating the range of variation in structural alternatives and developmental patterns to the case under consideration.

Comparisons between Arab revolution of 2011 and other cases of revolution are thus indispensable for understanding them within the sociology of revolution. Differences in revolutionary conditions in the Arab countries of North Africa and in Sub-Saharan Africa, on the one hand, and Russia, on the other, can explore the range of objective possibilities for conditions and paths other than those of the Arab revolution of 2011. Accordingly, Mathieu Hilgers and Augustin Loada in chapter VIII offer an in-depth analysis of revolutionary conditions in Burkina Faso as a “semiauthoritarian” regime, and Ivanov in chapter X does the same for the situation in the present decade in Russia a century after the revolution that shook the world in 1917.

In the tradition of Alexis de Tocqueville and in line with the development of sociology of revolution in the last quarter of the twentieth century, the first two chapters, by myself and Jack Goldstone, highlight the relevance of the state and the power structure of old regimes both to the breakdown of Arab authoritarianism and to the shaping of the new political regimes after the Arab revolutions and counterrevolutions of this decade. Chapter III, by Roberto Toscano, puts the highly debated issue of the prospects for democracy in the Muslim world in a comparative perspective that is often missing in the debate. The contextual and socioeconomic factors underlying state breakdown and revolution are the focus of chapter IV by Kevan Harris on inequality, chapter V by Can Ersoy on the ecology of revolutions, chapter IX, by Karim Fathi and Ireneusz Pawel Karolewski, on civil society, and chapter X, by Dmitry Ivanov, on economic and cultural change.

Comparisons need not always be explicit but can also implicitly inform in-depth analysis of individual cases; and explicit comparisons remain shallow without such analysis. Comparisons within the Arab revolutions require close examination of at least two different major cases. In chapter VI, Dalia Wahdan analyzes the course and consequences of the Arab revolution of 2011 in Egypt down to the end of 2012, and Jean-Pierre Filiu does the same for the decisive first year of the Arab revolution in Tunisia in chapter VII.

My own chapter I sets the stage for the other studies by offering a broad historical panorama of partially comparable instances of revolutionary transformations. It underlines the similarity between the Arab revolution of 2011 and the European revolution of 1848 as revolutions that spread very rapidly within a single civilizational zone, but with varied outcomes resulting from different conditions in different countries in that world region,

prolonging the revolutionary power struggle in some and producing counter-revolutions in others. My analysis highlights the neo-patrimonial character of authoritarian states as a common cause of the Arab revolutions of 2011, which are further typified as constitutional revolutions in their inception. To explain the variation in their process and consequences, however, I focus on the robustness of old regimes as mobilizational regimes, setting Tunisia and Egypt at one end of the continuum, Libya and Syria in the middle, and postrevolutionary Iran at the other end. The process of revolution is seen as determined structurally by the extent of survival or breakdown of the state, and contingently by the response of its armed forces. State breakdown can be seen as making for a prolonged revolutionary process, as in Libya, while substantial state survival making for a negotiated revolution comparable to the post-1989 so-called velvet or color revolutions of Central and Eastern Europe, as in Tunisia. Last but not least, the complete survival of the old power structure, including its deep state or security apparatus, proves conducive to counterrevolution, as in the case of Egypt.

The strong element of contingency in the consequences of revolutions stems from the responses of armed forces. If the military forces of the surviving state are used to suppress the revolution, civil war is likely to ensue, as in Syria. If the army embraces the revolution but seeks to maintain solely its vested institutional interests in its process, as in Tunisia, a constitutional revolution is likely to complete its course; and if the army intervenes to control the postrevolution constitutional transformation, the likely outcome is a constitutional counterrevolution, as in Egypt.

The treatment of the state as the major factor in causing revolutions and determining their consequences is amplified by Jack Goldstone in chapter II. Goldstone considers a much wider spectrum of Arab countries than I do, while similarly focusing on the characteristics of their regimes for explaining violent and peaceful outcomes of the 2011 uprising. Drawing on his well-known contribution to the sociology of revolutions, Goldstone argues for bringing the structural features of the old regimes back into the analysis of the Middle Eastern revolts, which he sees as obscured by undue attention to the role of the media and other mobilizational factors. He divides Middle Eastern authoritarianism into two ideal types of (traditional) monarchies, with a further subdivision between the oil-rich and the oil-poor, and neo-patrimonial or “personalist” regimes, in order to explain the far greater proneness of the latter type to revolution. Goldstone further proposes the strength of the middle class and civil society as additional explanatory factors to throw light on varied itineraries.

The issue of Islam and democracy is the main focus of chapter III, where Roberto Toscano can pose a number of probing questions from an in-depth historical perspective. Taking a long-term comparative view of the development of the rule of law and democracy, he dispels the neoconservative belief that democracy is a mirage because of the essential incompatibility of Islam and democracy.

In chapter IV, Kevan Harris discards inequality as a factor for breeding revolutions and instead focuses on the factors that made for the great expansion of the intelligentsia—the social stratum that was conspicuously the main social bearer of the Arab Spring. He sees the emergence of a “lumpen-intelligentsia” in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA region) as a key agent of social change, and its blocked social mobility as a main cause of the Arab revolution of 2011.

Can Ersoy, in chapter V, takes up the examination of the Arab Spring as a series of urban uprisings, placing it in the context of overurbanization as a notable feature of the Middle East and North Africa. He highlights the importance of “secondary cities” and the impact of small towns as places of revolution and sites of resistance, while focusing on the urban symbolism in motivating revolutionary gatherings and protest throughout the region. His analysis of the urban sites of rebellion can be seen as the geographical supplement to Harris’s social-structural analysis of the revolutionary agency of the disprivileged intelligentsia of MENA.

In chapter VI, Dalia Wahdan studies the impact of civic activism on the goals of the Egyptian revolution. She analyzes civic activism and mobilization in the context of state agencies under Mubarak as providing the path-dependent pattern of civic activism since the revolution in the “twilight” of the same state agencies. This sets the background to the emergence of the idea of the civic state (*dawla madania*), which quickly spread from Egypt to Tunisia to become the distinctive symbol of the aspirations of the Arab revolution of 2011 and has been written into the constitutional laws of both countries. It is indeed the civil state dreamed of by the above-cited Egyptian activist before his dream turned into a nightmare.

Tunisia is where the Arab revolution began in January 2011 and where it is generally considered to have been most successful in achieving its constitutional goal of democratic transition. In chapter VII, Jean-Pierre Filiu offers an incisive account of the first year of the Tunisian revolution. What sets the course of the Tunisian constitutional revolution of 2011 apart from that of Egypt is the historic compromise of the Islamist Nahda party (Ennahda) with its ruling coalition partner in foregoing the constitutional

entrenchment of the *shari`a* (Islamic law) as the source of legislation and its acceptance of the “civic state.” The main Tunisian Islamist party thus followed the example of its Turkish counterpart in accepting constitutional democracy and the secular state without any special Islamic reservations. Filiu sees this historic compromise in March 2012 as the concluding apex of the formative year of Tunisian revolution, and analyzes it as a consequence of the tripartite agreement reached by the Nahda with two other political parties shortly after the free elections of October 2011.

Wahdan’s analysis in chapter VI is centered on civil society in relation to the authoritarian state and revolution in Egypt that produced the amalgam, civic state. She examines the emergence of “civil society” as an analytical concept in opposition to “the state” as formulated by Hegel, which regained currency with the incipient transformation of Poland and other communist states in the 1980s. It is therefore highly apposite for its role in the Arab Spring to be compared to that in the transformation of Central and Eastern Europe, as is done in chapter IX by Fathi and Karolewski. They unpack the concept of civil society in a careful and systematic “transcultural” comparison between Eastern Europe and the MENA region. Their comparisons highlight the varying structures of civil society in relation to different types of state while highlighting the epochal, transcultural commonalities.

Why Burkina Faso? As Hilgers and Loada show in chapter VIII, Burkina Faso, a Sub-Saharan country with a population larger than that of Tunisia and Libya combined, immediately felt the impact of the North African Arab uprising, and the expectation of a similar Burkinabe Spring stimulated mass demonstrations and protests. The impact of the Arab revolution elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa took a while longer to become manifest and took the form not of pro-democracy peaceful demonstrations but of violent al-Qaeda Jihad, as in neighboring Mali. Despite many similar conditions between Burkina Faso and the Arab North Africa, such as the prominence of youth, the broad-based mobilization in Burkina Faso petered out and the expectation of a Burkinabe Spring failed to materialize. Like Goldstone and myself, Hilgers and Loada focus on regime characteristics and seek the main reason for this failure in the resilience of the country’s “semiauthoritarian” regime and its greater capacity for absorbing, confusing, and diffusing opposition as compared to the North African authoritarian states. Their typological analysis of semiauthoritarianism thus offers an interesting contrast to Goldstone’s typology of Middle Eastern personalist regimes and my own analysis of the neo-patrimonial and mobilizational

features of authoritarian regimes in their differential bearing on proneness to revolution.

And why Russia? If the Arab revolution of 2011 is expected to alter our notion of revolution, so did, most profoundly the Russian revolution of 1917. In chapter X, Ivanov celebrates the approaching centennial of the Russian revolution by reminding us, firstly, of the Russian contribution to theories of revolution, which can rightly be considered the self-understanding of that momentous event in world history. He then draws on Charles Tilly's distinction between a "revolutionary situation" and "a revolutionary outcome" to describe the next revolutionary situation in the comparative light of the Arab revolution of 2011. With 2017 around the corner, I am willing to place my bet on Ivanov's daring prediction.

REFERENCES

- Küng, H. 2013. "A Vatican Spring?" *The New York Times*, 2/28/03, op-ed, A 29.
- Weber, M. 1949 [1905]. "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy," in *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, ed. Edward A. Shils and H. A. Finch. New York: The Free Press, 49–112.