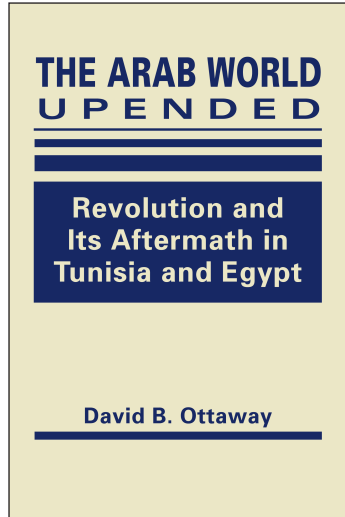


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The Arab World
Upended:
Revolution and
Its Aftermath in
Tunisia and Egypt

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Introduction

The idea for this book came immediately upon the explosion of popular uprisings across the Arab world in 2011 that led to the overthrow of four dictators and to civil war in Syria. Altogether they constituted the most profound upheaval the region has experienced in its contemporary history. I am a retired *Washington Post* reporter who had lived in Egypt and Algeria for seven years, and I was fascinated by these uprisings. I had begun my career as a foreign correspondent in Algeria at the time of its independence in 1962 and watched the war for liberation from French colonial rule transformed into a full-scale socialist revolution. I wrote a history of that period with my wife, Marina Ottaway, in *Algeria: The Politics of a Socialist Revolution* (1968). Nearly a half century later, I was watching millions of protesters in five Arab countries proclaim that they, too, were carrying out a revolution. But they hoisted no ideological banner, remained vague in their demands, and were notably leaderless. What were they all about, and after so many decades of political and economic stagnation in the Arab world, what had led to this sudden cataclysm?

I became intrigued by Arab activists' understanding of the term *revolution*, which they were using to describe their uprisings. I had lived through two revolutions—the first in Algeria and the second in Ethiopia, where a military revolt ended the long reign of Emperor Haile Selassie, scrapped the monarchy, destroyed the Ethiopian feudal system, and replaced it with a proto-communist regime. Marina and I had written about that transformation in *Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution* after being expelled from the country in 1977 in the midst of what was called the Red Terror. I felt I had had a fair amount of real-world experience with revolutions.

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The Arab uprisings of 2011 took place, of course, in a different time, culture, and international setting. At first, I was not sure how to go about assessing whether they qualified as major revolutions and, if so, in what sense. I began by consulting the writings of my late professor at Harvard, Crane Brinton, who had spent his lifetime studying social upheavals and produced a groundbreaking study of four great revolutions in England, the United States, France, and Russia. In *The Anatomy of Revolution*, he had distilled a set of common causes and symptoms and mapped out a common trajectory in their evolutions. As events proceeded after the initial uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, I began detecting shades of the various stages Brinton had described, enough to convince me that his schema could provide a useful reference point and analytic tool for examining these new events. Brinton's study had highlighted another aspect of the revolutions that had consumed the British Isles in mid-seventeenth century and France at the end of the eighteenth century and seemed relevant to those transpiring in Tunisia and Egypt: the central issue of religion and its relationship to the state, which in the Muslim Arab context meant the role of Islam and the struggle over an Islamic versus a civil state.

Brinton was not my only guide, however. The literature on revolutions is long, rich, and always evolving regarding their causes, evolutions, and outcomes. I found four reviews of the field particularly helpful: those contained in Lawrence Stone's *The Causes of the English Revolution* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Charles Tilly's *European Revolutions, 1492–1992* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993); Jack A. Goldstone's "Toward a Fourth Generation of Revolutionary Theory" (*Annual Review of Political Science*, vol. 4, 2001) and *Revolutions: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). As of early 2016, the study of the Arab uprisings as revolutions was still in its infancy. In fact, the only revolts that by then seemed ripe for analysis were those of Tunisia and Egypt; they were the only countries where an outcome of some kind was discernible. This was far from the case elsewhere. Civil wars had engulfed Syria and spread to neighboring Iraq and were still raging in Yemen and Libya. Even their survival as the same nation-states they had been before the Arab Spring was very much in question. A first attempt to examine any of these uprisings from a revolutionary and comparative perspective has been undertaken by a number of established scholars of social upheavals in *The Arab Revolution of 2011: A Comparative Perspective*, edited by Said Amir Arjomand (Albany: State University Press of New York, 2015). My own study fits into this general framework and focuses on the common internal dynamics around the hotly contested place of Islam in both the evolution and outcome of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions.

I looked at the history of previous Arab revolutions as well as at the writings of Arab academics and religious leaders for additional insights into the causes and meaning of revolution. To my surprise, I discovered one of the most interesting Arab analysts to be an ultra-conservative Saudi Wahhabi cleric, Sheikh Salman al Oadah, whom I went to see and interview in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Another was Rached Ghannouchi, an Islamic scholar and spiritual and political leader of Tunisia's revolution, whom I interviewed on multiple occasions.

Since 2010, I have made numerous trips to various Arab countries to gather material for this study. The first was to Egypt, which I had visited precisely one year before its uprising in January 2011. I had found that keystone nation where I had lived from 1981 to 1985 roiling with economic, social, and political discontent. I wrote an essay at the time (published by the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars) titled "Egypt at the Tipping Point?" in which I outlined the trouble President Hosni Mubarak faced in trying to transfer power to his son, Gamal. Since then, I have made five other trips to Egypt, five each to Tunisia and Saudi Arabia, three to Algeria, two to Morocco, and one to the Sudan and Iraq. My intent was to monitor over several years the course of events as they unfolded in countries where uprisings were taking place and those where little or nothing was happening. I chose Saudi Arabia for special attention because it is the Arab world's richest and most influential monarchy and because it quickly began to lead the counterrevolution. I have relied heavily on my own observations and interviews during these trips, as well as media coverage in English, French, and Arabic, as primary sources.

There were other questions to which I sought answers during my visits. For example, why had iron-fisted autocratic leaders of police states, like Hosni Mubarak in Egypt and Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia, fallen from power so quickly? What role had the United States played in their fall after more than a decade of pressing its autocratic Arab allies to reform and spending millions of dollars on prodemocracy programs? Had President Barack Obama's call on Mubarak to leave office really been a decisive factor, as Saudi Arabia believed?

Yet another issue I became fascinated with was the conflict between "revolutionary legitimacy" and "constitutional legitimacy" as the basis for power and actions. Protesters in the streets of Tunis and Cairo appealed implicitly to the former to justify their overthrow of ancien regime rulers. But they subsequently assumed that revolutionary legitimacy remained a higher authority than new constitutions approved in referenda empowering democratically elected leaders to end the revolution. As one constitutional scholar has aptly noted, revolutionaries are digging their

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own graves in pressing for new constitutions because they amount to “an act of self-liquidation of the revolution.”¹

The book is divided into five parts. Part 1 begins with a general discussion of various Western and Arab notions of the term *revolution* and earlier examples of what Arabs considered to be a revolution. In addition, I describe the economic, social, and political conditions prevailing prior to the outbreak of the 2011 uprisings.

Parts 2 and 3 track the history the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions over their first years using Brinton’s schema of revolutionary stages as a reference point. I have noted where his framework has to be modified or discarded because of the specificities of conditions in a contemporary Arab setting and also to the conflicting narratives of secularists and Islamists regarding the meaning and goals of revolution. Part 4 looks at the impact of a counterrevolution from abroad and the challenges facing countries after the brief, chaotic rule of Islamic parties had collapsed. I have not attempted to present a day-by-day account of events, but included those I believe to have changed attitudes or provoked the passage from one stage to another according to the Brintonian schema. Finally, I have examined the postrevolution period (at least the first two years) in both Tunisia and Egypt to gauge the prospects for other uprisings to come.

In the concluding Part 5, I summarize the similarities and differences between these Arab revolutions and the classic Western and contemporary ones, and I recap why the outcomes were so strikingly different in Tunisia and Egypt.

Notes

1. Ulrich K. Preuss, “Constitutional Powermaking for the New Polity: Some Deliberations on the Relations Between Constituent Power and the Constitution,” *Carozo Law Review*, 14 (1992–1993): 641.