The Age of Counter-Revolution

States and Revolutions in the Middle East

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Abstract

The 'Arab Spring' has come to symbolise defeated hopes for democracy and social justice in the Middle East. In this book, Jamie Allinson demonstrates how these defeats were far from inevitable. Rather than conceptualising the 'Arab Spring' as a series of failed revolutions, Allinson argues it is better understood as a series of successful counter revolutions. By comparing the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Bahrain, Libya and Yemen, this book shows how these profoundly revolutionary situations were overturned by counter revolutions. Placing the fate of the Arab uprisings in a global context, Allinson reveals how counter revolutions rely on popular support and cross borders to forge international alliances. By connecting the Arab uprisings to the decade of global protest that followed them, this innovative work demonstrates how new forms of counter revolution have rendered it near impossible to implement political change without first enacting fundamental social transformation.

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Dedication

In memory of Neil Davidson

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A Note on Transliteration

This book uses a modified version of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* system of transliteration for Arabic words and names. Diacritics are not used for long vowels, and emphatic consonants are rendered as the equivalent Latin consonant. Hamza before a vowel at the beginning of a word is not indicated. Thus, for those sounds that do not exist in English, the convention used in this book is: dh ⊠ d ⊠ t ⊠ gh ⊠

When 'taa marbuta' at the end of a word ⊠ is part of a genitive construction it is 't' and otherwise 'a.'

Arabic terms are rendered in italics; commonly used words derived from Arabic (e.g. sheikh) are not. Common English spellings for personal and place names are used rather than Taᴐifiyya: where an organisation already uses a spelling in a European language (e.g. 'Nidaa Tounes' and 'Tamarrod'), that is preferred rather than transliteration.

1. Introduction; Another World Was Possible?

I always thought that something, in 1920 25, was almost born: Lenin, Freud, Surrealism, revolutions, jazz, silent films. All this could have come together. And then each followed its sporadic destiny. Isolated, they could all be strangled. It is only in my memory that they made up a world. Jean Paul Sartre, war diary1

But one thing I do remember, one thing I know: the sense of possibility was real. It may have been naive to believe our dream could come true, but it was not foolish to believe another world was possible. It really was. Or at least that's how I remember it. Alaa Abdel Fattah2

Revolutions create worlds of possibility. Rarely, however, do the orders established in their aftermath reflect those imagined by their participants. From John Milton to Frantz Fanon, it is the tragic mode that dominates amongst reflections by revolutionaries on the results of the revolutions for which they fought. What came to be falls short of what could have been. One finds, in the titles of historical works on revolutions, the same words appearing and re-appearing with grim regularity: betrayal, loss, defeat and tragedy. The lesson learned, in the Western canon of political thought, is that it is better not to have revolutions at all, for to do so is to 'stir up the great fountains of the deep to overwhelm us'.3

Few cycles of revolutionary upheaval have evinced more painfully this shortfall between initial hope and eventual despair than that which came to be known as the 'Arab Spring'.4 In late 2010, demonstrations and strikes – following the self-immolation of a street vendor, Mohammed Bouazizi, in protest at police harassment – spread throughout Tunisia, eventually leading to the toppling of the dictator of that country, Zine el Abedine Ben Ali. Similar protest movements broke out in much of the rest of the Arab world. Three incumbent autocrats – Zine el Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak in Egypt and Ali Abdallah Saleh in Yemen – were forced from power, while a fourth, Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, was killed by his opponents after a NATO-led aerial campaign against his forces combined with an armed uprising concentrated in the east of the country. Bashar al-Assad in Syria and the Khalifa monarchs of Bahrain retained power but were forced to rely on external military intervention to regain control of their own territories. For a time, the example of these uprisings seemed to inspire imitation, or at least appropriation of their tactical repertoire, from Manhattan to Athens. In that brief moment, something of the air of a new 'springtime

of the peoples' diffused from the Arab world to places culturally and geographically far distant.

The fruits of these struggles proved bitter indeed. Within three years of the initial uprisings, a revivified dictatorship held sway in Egypt, under the former Colonel General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi; the Khalifas maintained their rule over a cowed dominion; and Libya, Yemen and Syria had slipped into civil war. The staggering barbarism of the latter conflict gave birth to a new form of authoritarian state, as the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) established itself in the borderlands between eastern Syria and western Iraq.5 The Middle East became, once again, the site of bloody military contest between great powers both within (Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey) and outside the region (Russia and the United States). This entanglement led, more than once, to the threat of global nuclear confrontation, not seen since the most perilous days of the Cold War. Where once Arab protestors had awakened emulation abroad, new forms of xenophobic reaction in Europe and the Americas took as their prime target the refugees fleeing the general crisis of order in the Middle East.

The combination of revolutionary wave and global crisis is not an unfamiliar one. The history of the 'Atlantic revolutions' of the late eighteenth century or of the conflagrations surrounding the Russian Revolution of 1917 is reminder enough of the strongly established relationship between war and revolution.6 Yet, the storm that burst forth in the Arab world in 2011 occurred in a global order accustomed to the idea that such concurrences were a thing of the past. Revolutions there might be, but these were expected to be largely peaceful, resolved by negotiated means and welcomed rather than opposed by the states of the international system.7

In retrospect, the Arab uprisings of 2011 appear as the moment in which this expectation collapsed. Increasing mass mobilisations became severed from the political transitions they were once expected to provoke. The Arab revolutions both initiated and prefigured a trend of global protest, accompanied by political polarisation, in the decade that would follow them. From the anti-austerity protests of southern Europe to the anti-racist 'Black Lives Matter' rebellions in the United States, amongst many other examples, apparently leaderless and spontaneous mass

Introduction: Another World Was Possible? 3 movements swarmed into streets and squares. The 2010s witnessed a wave of protest greater than any since that sparked by the Russian Revolution of 1917. Across the world, anti-government protests increased by 11.5 per cent year on year throughout the 2010s: all of the five largest demonstrations in US history occurred during that decade.8 The Arab uprisings thus represent not a regional exception but 'a nearvertical inflection point in which two decades of relative calm instantly reversed into several years of elevated global unrest'.9 By the second decade of the twenty-first century, the world had become a far more 'revolutionary' place – in the sense of the prevalence of mass mobilisations overthrowing incumbent governments – than it had been a century before.10 Yet revolution in the sense of complete social transformation had – almost – vanished as a political horizon.

Rather than substantial social or even political transformation, the 2010s thus witnessed the birth and recrudescence of authoritarian and exclusionary politics. Former boosters of the 'wave' of liberal democratisation between 1975 and 2000 began to detect a decrease in both the quantity and quality of formal democracies.11 When the revolutionary wave returned to the Arab world in 2019, engulfing states such as Iraq, Sudan, Algeria and Lebanon, the protestors had learned from the experiences of their predecessors to insist on thoroughgoing transformations of their polities and societies, not the mere shuffling of personnel.12

To understand the fate of the uprisings of 2011 is therefore also to tackle the puzzle of why unprecedented levels of political mobilisation have brought forth – at the time of writing – such limited change. How did the Arab revolutions, filled with aspirations to social justice, freedom and human dignity, result in the furies of brutal repression, savage civil conflict and even the prospect of world war? This book is an attempt to answer this question and, thereby, the broader global paradox of increasing revolutionary mobilisation producing limited social and political transformation. The answer I give is that the Arab revolutions, like revolutions in general, cannot be said simply to 'fail': rather, *counterrevolution* must also succeed.

Counter-revolution intervenes between the revolutionary situations produced by mass uprisings from below and the eventual outcomes that issue from them. Nonetheless, little scholarly attention has been devoted to the phenomenon.13 This blind spot derives in part, as I illustrate in the second chapter of this book, from the association of counter-revolution with coercive relations of agrarian exploitation that had largely disappeared by the early twenty-first century. Rather than bind counterrevolution to such a particular historical context – to the trinity of throne, sword and altar familiar from Europe's nineteenthand twentieth- century revolutions – I examine how they bind opponents of revolution from 'above', 'below' and 'without' to pursue a policy of eradicating revolutionary movements. The historical legacy of previous revolutions from above, eradicating exactly that class of coercive landlords associated with previous instances of counter-revolution, provided one means to create a counter-revolutionary subject – and the competitive circuits of capital and geopolitical influence in the region provided another.

Such is the argument pursued in the rest of this book. In making it, I am claiming that the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Libya, Yemen and Bahrain belong not solely to the history of the Arab and Islamic world but also to a category of phenomena that has been constitutive of *global* modernity: revolutions. This is, as we shall see, a controversial claim, when the revolutionary nature of these events has been widely disputed. Why attempt to make it at all? Is an explanation of the fate of the Arab uprisings based on counter-revolution even required?

The Vernacular Theory of the Arab Spring

The contrast between these expectations and the outcomes of the Arab uprisings led not to a reconsideration of the premises of those expectations but to a genre of commentary on the 'failure of the Arab Spring', or, in a favoured turn of metaphor, the passage from 'Arab Spring' to 'Arab winter'.14 Such arguments reprised older forms of Orientalist reason, which see the politics of the Middle East as the outcomes of a cultural and religious heritage endogenous to the region. The explanations for the 'failure of the Arab Spring', in this reading, are to be found in a familiar trio of factors: the insufficient modernity of societies still structured by sub-national and tribal allegiance; the anachronistic influence of – Islamic – religious belief and hence the conflict between political movements that seek to impose such belief at the heart of the state versus those committed to 'secularism'; and the gruesome outcome of the interaction between the latter two dynamics, the conflict between religious sects as the prime motive force of the politics of the region.

In such readings, the Arab Spring and its consequences belong not to a global history of revolution, counter-revolution and the changing forms of society that produce these phenomena but rather to a provincial history of the Arab and Islamic world. There is nothing to be learned from them that we did not already know. The bloody welter of conflict and repression that followed the uprisings was simply the endpoint of the twentieth-century attempt to suture a Western model of the rational sovereign state onto places where segmented identities of tribe and sect, not abstract nationhood, formed 'the traditional organizing principle of

The Vernacular Theory of the Arab Spring 5 society'.15 Spared – or denied – the destruction of tribal society wrought by Europeans on their longer-standing New World possessions, inhabitants of the post-colonial Arab states were fated to fall back on these older loyalties when the lid of state repression was lifted and all hell burst forth.16

The function of such repression, in this reading of the Arab Spring, was to keep at bay the most threatening bearers of the remnants of premodern society, Islamists.17 The Arab republics – for, with the exception of Bahrain, all of the states to have witnessed the revolutions of the Arab Spring belonged to this category – were indubitably brutal, corrupt and repressive: but they were, as an assumed recompense, 'secular'. This term did not mean the constitutional injunction of the separation of the state from religious practice, for there is no Arab state that does not base its legal system on inherited traditions of religious jurisprudence. Rather secularism here meant the incorporation and management of the latter by the former, conceived as a form of 'national progress'.18 Secularism served as a justification for undemocratic rule, since, as the outcomes of the contested elections that followed the Arab Spring showed, Islamists were likely to win them. In this view, the prospect of such victories threatened a 'Westernised elite' or 'secular middle class', who would then return to the side of the authoritarian militaries that promised to protect them.19 The principal contradiction in Arab societies, unfolding in the wake of the Arab Spring, is then rendered as that

between 'secular liberals', seen as representatives of a global modernity, and Islamists seen as recalcitrant, if popular, hold-outs against that modernity.20

These two frames for viewing the Arab Spring and its aftermath – primordial loyalty and religious politics – come together in a third: the idea that what unfolded in the Middle East after 2011, both between and within states, was an all-out sectarian war, a continuation of the 'oldest and bitterest clan feud' in the Middle East.21 The dispute in question was the split between the followers of the Prophet at the very foundation of Islam, producing the schism between Sunni and Shi'a supposedly still being played out in the battlefields of Syria, Yemen and Iraq and in confrontation between Saudi Arabia and Iran the better part of two millennia later. US President Barack Obama, viewing the outcomes of the Arab Spring not as opportunity but as threat for the United States, declaimed in his final State of the Union address that 'we're threatened less by evil empires and more by failing states', the product of a 'transformation' of the Middle East that would 'play out for a generation, rooted in conflicts that date back millennia'.22 For good measure, Obama reinforced the point in a later interview: 'you've got countries that have very few civic traditions, so that as autocratic regimes start fraying, the only organising principles are sectarian'.23 Nor was this argument restricted to the centre or right of the political spectrum. Some of the keenest critics of US foreign policy in the Middle East shared this analysis of post–Arab Spring conflicts as expressions of the primordial rift between Sunni and Shi'a.24

These arguments are at best inadequate, and at worst misleading, as explanations for the origins of the Arab Spring and the implosion that followed it. In taking for granted such categories of analysis as tribe, sect or Islamism – assumed to be endogenous to the region – they stand in a long tradition of ascribing invariant cultural characteristics to the Middle East and Islamic world and then explaining particular historical phenomena by means of the characteristics thus ascribed.25 Such explanations replicate broader errors in the human and social sciences: seeing the events of the present as natural and immutable and then reading the characteristics of that present back into the past, obscuring the ruptures between, and specificities of, different historical epochs.26

The point of this critique is not to say that Islamism, or sectarianism, or indeed tribalism, is unimportant in understanding the trajectories of the post–Arab Spring Middle East. Rather, it is to give them their due importance. When 'Islam', 'sectarianism' or 'tribes' are offered as the reasons for civil war or repression in the Arab world, they function not as explanations but as shorthand. None of these categories, any more or less than those of class or gender, for example, are objects in their own right: they are particular structures of relations that change over time, place and political context. All of the six revolutions examined in this book featured revolutionary Islamists and counter-revolutionary ones (not to mention the universal alignment of the religious scholarly establishment with the old regimes): secularists who took to the revolutionary barricades and those who fought for the old regimes – in some cases, these were the same people.

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Likewise, co-sectarians could be found on either side of the revolutionary–counter-revolutionary divide. Arabic-speaking Sunni Muslims certainly formed the majority of the participants in the Syrian revolution, for example (as they do the Syrian population as a whole), and Sunni Islamists eventually came to dominate the armed rebellion against Bashar al-Assad, an Alawi – but this affiliation placed no barrier to his firm alliance with the major portion of Syria's Sunni bourgeoisie.27 Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, announcing in Cairo in 2013 the overthrow of an elected Islamist president, was flanked not only by the Coptic pope and the shaykh of Al-Azhar but by representatives of the hard-line Islamist party, Nour.28 In Libya, where the tribe is an undeniable feature of social life, members of the same tribe were to be found on opposing sides of the barricades during the revolution of 2011.29 To take such categories as sect, tribe or Islam seriously means not to accept them as reified entities, causal agents in their own right, but as sites and means of historically constituted struggle.30

To understand the trajectories these struggles took, therefore, requires a different lens to that of the 'vernacular theory' of tribes, Muslims and sects as the prime movers of politics in the Middle East.31 I draw instead on the scholarly tradition that has done most to analyse and explain the causes, dynamics and consequences of revolutions: that of historical sociology.32 In so doing, I focus on a hitherto understudied phenomenon in the field, that of counter-revolution. In contrast to the narrative arc drawn between 'Arab spring' and 'Arab winter', wherein the catastrophes of civil war and renewed dictatorship follow popular uprisings like the turning of the seasons, I seek to restate the historically open-ended character of these revolutions. Their outcome, the victory of counterrevolutions across most of the region, cannot be assumed but must rather be explained. As Victor Serge wrote of the fate of the Russian Revolution: 'to judge the living man by the death germs which the autopsy reveals in the corpse – and which he may have carried with him since his birth – is that very sensible?'33

This change of focus, away from the failure of revolutions towards the success of counter-revolution, also implies a break with the existing understandings of political transition in the region. These understandings are twofold: one of democratisation from above, and its frustration, and the other of contentious politics from below.

Reluctant Democrats, Resilient Autocrats

The study of the politics of the Arab world, before and after 2011, has been dominated by a question of absence and failure: why had (most) Arab states failed to become democracies?34 The centrality of this question was honoured even amongst those who inverted its terms – for to ask why a state is successful at not being a democracy is still a question about democracy.35 The iterations of this debate and the positions staked out within it, thus, all revolved around a lack or gap evident when the political systems of the Arab Middle East were compared to those of other regions

of the world. After an initial period of shock amongst scholars and policymakers, the revolutions of 2011 were expected to resolve the problem by closing this gap.36

The democracy that was missing in the Arab world, and which was anticipated to be provided by the uprisings, was of a particular kind. The guiding principles of this form of democracy, and therefore of the academic study of Arab un-democracy, were abstracted from the experiences of the 1980s and 1990s in Latin America and Eastern Europe. The first of these was that democracy was a universally applicable set of institutional arrangements for governance by freely elected officials, constrained by constitutions, and safeguarded by independent judiciaries.37 The second was that these arrangements could be successfully reached by a process of transition, negotiated between the willing elements of regime and opposition: mass mobilisation could only aid the 'breakthrough' to such a process.38 The third was that such a successful outcome is the product of variables distributed unevenly across states and therefore visible in comparison between them, rather than of particular histories of struggle.39

The hold of this mode of thinking about Arab un-democracy was brief, undermined both by events outside the academy and by its own contradictions. The US invasion of Iraq in 2003, garlanded with a popularised version of the democratisation thesis,40 was followed by an extension of the 'democracy agenda' to American policy in the region as a whole, with far from encouraging results. Iraq was soon braced by insurgency and civil war, while elections to the Palestinian legislature in 2006 (largely free) and the Egyptian Parliament (less un-free than past contests) in 2005 demonstrated only the strength of Islamist candidates. The prospect of wholesale democratisation in the region, especially in those states allied to the United States, where American voices would be most attentively heard, became less welcome to Washington.

This external critique was accompanied by an internal one, with the emergence of 'post-democratisation' or 'authoritarian resilience' as trends in the study of Arab politics.41 The central point of these arguments was that scholars should, instead of seeking to explain why Arab states failed to approximate a democratic model, focus on how their ruling regimes actually operated: not to refer to a polar opposition between democracy and the 'residual category' of authoritarianism but rather to construct taxonomies of the forms, and explanations for the success, of the latter.42 Authoritarianism was not retreating but rather 'upgraded' and – the key term – resilient.43 Supplely deflecting external pressure, and incorporating domestic opposition, through a fascia of democratic reform, the regimes of Arab un-democracy were in fact consolidating themselves.

The outbreak of revolutionary uprisings in 2010–11 challenged both sides of the debate on Arab un-democracy. The initial sweep of the protests, their apparent lack of any pre-determined programmatic character and the appeal of their slogans to universal claims of citizenship and human rights seemed to herald the long-awaited 'breakdown' that would open the way to democratic transition.44 The variation in results of the uprisings – no leadership change in Bahrain and Syria; leadership change but only a reversed or failed transition in Egypt, Libya and Yemen; and a completed transition

only in Tunisia – led to a reprisal of attempts to explain Arab un-democracy, reliant on the same array of factors as before 2011: most typically, monarchies, militaries, oil rent and religious identity.

Monarchical rule, or at least a previously assured inheritance of power, was associated with the absence or failure of the 'breakdown' moment to occur.45 Rents permitted either populations as a whole or the coercive apparatus to be bought off.46 Dictators were most likely to be deposed in states with relatively independent military institutions, able to separate their (and the state's) interests from the immediate clique of the ruler.47 Tunisia's exception was the result of a military both institutionally separate from the ruling party and family and with an institutional tradition of respecting civilian rule. Failed transitions, such as Egypt's, resulted from badly designed processes, entrenching the split in oppositions between those who promoted and those who feared the electoral success of parties based on some form of Islamic identity.48 If not all such interpretations of the results of the Arab uprisings partook of so bold a rehabilitation of classical modernisation theory as the claim that 'democracy comes only after certain developmental prerequisites have been met',49 the concept of the state as a variable remained central to all. In this reading, varying degrees of 'stateness', of the approximation to the ideal of bureaucratic, rational independence derived from Max Weber, give rise to the different outcomes of the uprising.50 The most effective and cohesive state, Tunisia, underwent the most extensive transition to democracy: the others, being to some or other extent ineffective and incoherent, produced more disappointing results.51

What is to be gained, and lost, by abandoning the rubric of democratisation versus authoritarian resilience for that of revolution and counter-revolution in understanding the Arab Spring? One must register first the congruence of such a lens with the experience of the Arab revolutions. Contrary to portrayals of these uprisings, especially in states opposed to Western dominance over the region, as an extension of the Bush-era programme of regime change by military means,52 these *were* indigenous popular revolts seeking a transition to a rights-based political order: the slogans 'The people demand the fall of the regime' and 'Bread, freedom, human dignity' attest to that reality. Where democratisation theorists err is in taking a standpoint from above and, without these popular movements, reading them through the experiences of the so-called third wave53 of democratisation of the last quarter of the twentieth century.

In such a framework, mass revolts are merely a precursor to the real business of transition pacts conducted between opposition and regime elites. The continuation of popular mobilisation may even inhibit the success of such a pact.54 In this model, the state is seen as a more or less neutral entity following a path – the transition – to liberal democracy. The failure to achieve that endpoint is then to be ascribed to the presence of obstacles, insufficiently democratically minded sections of the regime or opposition, who function as 'spoilers' of the process.55 What this perspective misses is that returns to authoritarianism, or indeed the suppression of challenges to it, are not 'failures' at all: they are successes, successes of repressing or reversing the popular movement against

the power of the ruling elites concentrated in the regimes. At times, transition processes may themselves also serve to demobilise and disorganise such movements.56 From a vantage point inside the transition process, counter-revolutions become impossible to see.

This lacuna derives from the origin of democratic transition theory. The criterion against which Arab un-democracy was judged, and indeed rendered an object of international management, was a fundamental change that occurred in the nature of revolutionary contestation in the last quarter of the twentieth century. From roughly the Portuguese revolution of 1974–75, confrontational movements from below came – with some significant exceptions such as the Iranian revolution of 1979 – to seek mainly changes of political regime rather than social order.57 That is to say, they sought the downfall of particular regimes, dictators, cliques and cronies at most of the broader systems of authoritarian power that sustained these, and their replacement with some form of electoral democracy and guarantees of individual rights. As articulated by the leaders they threw up, if not always by all of the participants, these were revolutions to emulate, rather than overthrow, the existing model of capitalist democracy in the United States and Western Europe. The paradigmatic case of such revolutions was, of course, the Eastern European uprisings that caused the Soviet Union itself to collapse, ending the Cold War: just as consequential were the uprisings that ended autocracies – often erstwhile US allies – in large parts of Asia and Latin America. Initial studies of the Arab revolutions expected them to replicate these 'non-violent' revolutions with broad but shallow aims, and consequently few enemies.58 Daniel Ritter, the most rigorous exponent of this thesis, argues that mobilisations against regimes aligned with the US-led liberal world order – for example, in Egypt – take advantage of the rhetorical commitment to human rights consequent upon such alignment in order to topple them. No such restraint applies to regimes not so aligned, explaining the differential results of the uprisings.59

The Arab uprisings were quite different, however, to this model of the 'long 1990s',60 upon which the expectations of democratic transition were based. They were, contrary to popular perception, violent, divisive and generative of enemies at home and abroad.61 These divisions revolved around, even if they did not consciously express, the crisis of a particular economic model: unlike earlier transition pacts, the sense of chaotic disorder, and of what might ensue from the onrush of a 'sea of angry people', was quite real.62 The consequent campaigns of military, political and juridical repression were not 'failures' of an assumed transition process, but – at least *pro-tempore* – successful attempts to stanch this flow. If democratic transition is an imperfect lens through which to view this process, what of its contender, authoritarian resilience?

Again, the propositions of authoritarian resilience are far from empirically unsupported. The Arab Spring did not, with little exception, bring about the end of undemocratic dictatorships but, if anything, brought fiercer re-charged versions of them. In this sense, Arab authoritarianism could be said to be resilient.63 Yet neither the term nor the argument to which it refers quite captures the dynamics at work. 'Resilience'

implies the flexibility and adaptability of an organism to new, potentially lifethreatening conditions: in the case of the Arab regimes, the change in conditions was precisely the isolation enforced on them by the transition waves of the 1980s and 1990s, and the threat of US-led regime change after Iraq. Their resilience consisted of superficial adaptation to see off this challenge. The uprisings of 2011 brought a quite different, indeed more existential, threat and thereby a different outcome. No regime was left the same as before: an initial democratisation was either moderated (Tunisia) or overthrown (Egypt); the hold of the regime collapsed in civil war (Libya and Yemen); was maintained by external intervention (Bahrain); or a combination of the latter two (Syria). These were not moments of resilience but of deep *recomposition*. They necessitated not only some strategic tinkering by the central core of the regimes but the forging of a new compact, based around new forms of violent political exclusion.

This necessity of forging a popular base to overcome the revolutionary challenge leads us to a further account of the politics of the Middle East, before and after 2011, one that looks not from above but below. Such works turn away from the focus on the centralised politics of regimes and oppositions that characterised both the search for democratising tendencies and the explanation of robustly non-democratic realities. Often in response to the outbursts of popular struggle that preceded the greater conflagration of 2011, these works concerned themselves with the ruled rather than the rulers. How did they fare in the face of revolutions that appeared at first to vindicate their approach, only to fall into calamitous results?

The Dark Side of Contention

The study of politics from below seemed an initial counterweight to the failure of political scientists to foresee the Arab uprisings.64 Eyes trained on the continuous traditions of popular resistance and mobilisation against state power would be likelier to grasp both the nature of the rupture wrought by such mobilisation, and its continuity with previous forms of unruly and informal politics. Rather than accept the notion of politics in the Middle East as a series of regional particularities to be explained, this shift of focus extended existing general frames of understanding to the popular politics of the Arab world before and during the uprisings.65 This turn to politics from below functioned in two, by no means incompatible, registers: one concerning power, domination and resistance, in general, and the other the tactics and forms of mobilisation by which power is contested.

The wellspring of the former was to be found in a reworked understanding of the concept of political power, one with its roots in the genealogies of Michel Foucault and the subaltern histories and ethnographies of EP Thompson and James C Scott. In this understanding, power is distributed in seams, lodes and webs rather than a consolidated bloc.66 The resistance to it thereby takes the form, not of direct confrontation but of more quotidian measures – the 'prosaic constant struggle' waged by means of 'foot

dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage'.67 Evading, mocking and stymieing the operations of power here constitute an 'infra-politics' of continual resistance.68

Before 2011, such acts of everyday resistance co-existed with more readily visible kinds of mobilisation: representing, in Asef Bayat's words, a 'social nonmovement' of speech and practice in public space.69 The strength of such 'nonmovements' was registered by their absence, in states such as Syria, wherein inhabitants followed careful rules of public loyalty to the regime, not in order to resist but to survive.70 In 2011, movement and 'nonmovement' suffused one another to form collective, revolutionary subjects rooted primarily amongst the 'popular forces' of urban centres.71 The revolutions, therefore, took on a capillary, horizontal or 'leaderless' character:72 one welcomed as the confirmation of the birth of a new kind of revolution, a multitudinous movement of the squares at odds with older hierarchies of programme and organisation.73 This concern with the dynamics of mobilisation – and nonmobilisation – found a more systematic form in the application of variants of 'Social Movement Theory' and 'contentious politics' to the Middle East before and after 2011. Delineating the latter as a general phenomenon of 'interactions in which actors make claims bearing on other actors' interests, leading to co-ordinated efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs, in which governments are involved as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties',74 social movement theorists seek both to describe and to explain the activities of these claim-making collectivities. Such collective actors consist of the campaign of contention itself, drawing upon the 'social bases' of organisation, finance and 'cultural frameworks' to make their claims.75 'Political opportunity structures' – some shift or opening in the governing regime – offer these movements the chance to make their contentious claims, in which they make use of a repertoire of tactics undergirded by certain 'cultural frames', such as the symbolism of freedom or non-violence.76

The extension of Social Movement Theory, and the study of contentious politics, to the Middle East occurred before 2011: this continuity allowed the revolutions to be understood as part of a stream of contention that preceded them amongst workers, democracy activists and the urban poor.77 Tilly and Tarrow provided such a reading themselves, seeing in the Arab Spring an instantiation of their concepts of political opportunity, actor constitution, alliance-seeking and radicalisation.78

Careful scholarship has begun to excavate the relations between contentious politics within states, and geopolitics between them.79 Nonetheless, as John Chalcraft notes, the very breadth of ambition of Social Movement Theory, as well as the sophistication of its descriptive taxonomies, is won at the expense of contextual distinction.80 Such distinction is particularly important, as Social Movement theorists acknowledge, in the midst of 'a revolutionary situation' wherein 'many actors...mobilize for action'.81 Distinguishing not just *how* they mobilise but *why* and to what end, in such a situation, requires greater attention to counter-revolutionary actors than hitherto offered by the contentious politics approach.

Such 'counter-movements'82 have rarely formed the focus of study in Social Movement Theory. With few exceptions,83 the study of regime responses in Social Movement Theory – that is to say, *policies* of counterrevolution – are not linked to the building of counter-*movements* that support and extend those policies. The formation of such links, reaching down from the heart of the *ancien regime* into the 'popular forces' and outward to circuits of regional and global inter-state competition, will be the subject matter of this book. I am concerned not with how a system of power is evaded or subverted but how it is re-constituted after a collapse:84 not just with the making of contentious claims on regimes but their victory over those who make such claims. For that reason, I focus not on the general dynamics and mechanisms of movements and contention but on the specific form of revolution and counter-revolution, as these were visible in the Middle East after 2011.

Absent Revolutions, Passive Revolutions, Counter-Revolutions

This book, of course, is not the first to address the question of the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary events of the 'Arab Spring'. Three broad streams in the literature may be identified. The first, to which I have already alluded, simply maintains that these were not revolutions because they did not issue in successful, profound and enduring social change. The second adopts a Gramscian approach to see the 2011 uprisings open-ended revolutionary situations that nonetheless issued – particularly in Egypt – in hybrid forms of revolution such as 'revolution-restorations' or 'passive revolutions'. The third explicitly treats the Arab Spring and its aftermath through the lens of counterrevolution, as I do in this book. What then is distinctive about my approach and why is it worth adding yet another work to the already existing literature on the subject?

The first set of literature stands against my argument that rather than simply being failed uprisings, the outcomes of 2011 must be understood as (largely) successful counter-revolutions. The point is made concisely by Hussein Agha and Robert Malley: '[t]his [the 25th of January uprising in Egypt] is not a revolution' because it brought neither revolutionary personnel nor revolutionary ideology to power.85 This argument is echoed and extended by Hugh Roberts, who characterises the Egyptian uprising, for the same reason, as 'the revolution that wasn't'.86 Further complicating the picture, the regimes that the uprisings sought to topple often considered themselves, or their origins, to be revolutionary. Opposition to such regimes could itself then be argued to be counterrevolutionary, as the same author argues in the case of Libya: a 'counterfeit revolution passed off as the real thing' or perhaps a 'counter-revolution' based on 'toxic identity issues' and the dominance of 'the Islamist aspect of the Libyan rebellion'.87 Surveying the wreckage of civil war in his own country and across the region five

years after the outbreak of the revolutions, Adonis, Syria's greatest modern poet and noted opponent of the uprising of 2011, summed up this genre of commentary: '[t]he important thing is the outcome of revolutions, not their beginnings'.88

Works based on more solid sociological foundations have reached the same conclusion: that despite the evident challenge these uprisings posed to the ruling regimes of the states in which they occurred, and the selfconception of the millions of participants in them as *thuwwar* – 'revolutionaries'– these uprisings must be necessarily excluded from revolutionary status on the grounds that they had failed to match established criteria of revolutionary success.89 For example, Brownlee, Masoud and Reynold's survey of the Arab Spring explicitly takes as its yardstick 'Skocpol's...definition of revolutions as a rapid, structural transformation of the state (and, for social revolutions, society)' and according to which 'neither Egypt nor the other Arab Spring cases clear the bar'.90 Robert Springborg, likewise, characterises the Egyptian uprising as a 'brief moment of mobilization' in a 'few urban areas'.91 For authors such as Joel Beinin and Sean McMahon, an Egyptian revolution has yet to occur – on the Skocpolian grounds that revolution means the building of a new social and political order brought about by mass mobilisation.92

Part of the contribution of this book is to demonstrate the empirical inaccuracy of these arguments. As the evidence in Chapter 3 demonstrates, the Arab uprisings were, in fact, convulsive episodes that shattered existing state structures or forced their re-composition. They were also 'carried through by class-based revolts from below'. In the breadth and rapidity of their spread and the severity of their consequences, they equal, if not outdo, the wave of protests that brought down the former Soviet bloc, as well as many previous revolutionary waves. If the study of revolutions *cannot* encompass such events, then it must become a very circumscribed sphere of knowledge indeed, excluding from its bounds such instances as the German revolution of 1918–20, the Spanish revolution of 1936–38, the Chinese Revolution of 1926 or the Hungarian uprising of 1956 – turning points without which neither the history of revolutionary movements nor of the twentieth century as a whole could be understood. The failure of such episodes to issue in lasting political or social transformation should form the starting point, not the end, of enquiry.

As I discuss further in the second chapter, this empirical flaw reveals the analytical one. To define revolutions by their endpoints implies, as Brecht de Smet notes, the fallacy of selecting cases on the dependent variable. If we only analyse successful revolutions, how can we know why revolutions succeed or fail? Moreover, the success of counter-revolutions becomes inexplicable from this standpoint.93 If it is a requirement of the definition of revolutions that they be successful, then successful counterrevolution becomes a conceptual impossibility. A counter-revolution can only occur against a revolution – but if a revolution is reversed, then it drops from its former revolutionary status. The thing that reversed it can, therefore, no longer be considered a counter-revolution, rendering the argument nugatory. Reflecting this impasse, founding works of the sociology of revolution, such as those of Skocpol or Jack

Goldstone, treat counter-revolution as empirically vital but conceptually negligible. Counter-revolutionaries, through their armed opposition to revolution, play essential roles in the historical narrative of revolutionary outcomes but occupy little or no space in the theoretical frameworks offered to explain them.94 Adonis may well be right that revolutionary endings are more important than revolutionary beginnings, but without an account of counter-revolution the reasons for those endings slip into obscurity.

There is another way of treating the outcomes of the 2011 uprisings, which is to see them as hybrid, deflected or co-opted forms of revolution. The most prominent version of this argument is to be found in the work of Brecht de Smet. Rather than restrict the meaning of revolution to successful instances of profound social change brought about by mass mobilisation from below, De Smet argues that 'a process should [not] be deemed a revolution or not solely based on its objective outcomes'.95 The Egyptian revolution, De Smet maintains, represents instead a 'passive revolution', in Gramsci's terms. Passive revolution refers to the incorporation of subaltern demands and personnel by the ruling class through a process of '*trasformismo*'– new projects of national modernisa- tion – that emerge from moments of revolutionary crisis.96 Such a transformation is achieved by a military 'Caesarism' presenting itself as a resolution to the contradictions of a society in organic crisis while in reality remaining bound to its ruling class.97 Cihan Tugal's account of the rise of Turkey's Justice and Development Party as a 'revolutionrestoration' that absorbed the 'Islamic challenge to capitalism' posed by the 1979 Iranian revolution, only to founder in the Egyptian case, draws upon a similar theoretical apparatus.98

This book shares with De Smet the view of the Egyptian revolution (and broader Arab revolution) as an open-ended process that was trapped between 'social' and 'political emancipation' by its own failure to produce durable institutional form and hence was vulnerable to counter-revolution.99 Our differences lie in the application of the ideas of passive revolution and counter-revolution. As Anne Alexander and Sameh Naguib note, the usage of the former term to describe the Egyptian military coup of 2013 stretches the concept in unproductive ways.100 'Passive revolution' typically refers to the attempt, both impelled and mediated by geopolitical competition, for ruling classes to neutralise threats to their domination by re-organising social relations 'from above'.101 I agree with Roberto Roccu that the core of the latter refers to a process of 'fulfilment' and 'displacement' of revolutionary demands in an international context that requires 'restructuring on the national scale'.102 Counter-revolution, although always incorporating elements of revolutionary form, does not fulfil revolutionary demands but rather abnegates them and attempts the political exclusion or physical destruction of their authors. The international context – states allied to the counter-revolution – here does not impel but rather impedes and reverses social transformation. Therefore, counterrevolutionaries face a different problem to that of passive revolutionaries. As explicated in the next chapter, counter-revolution always involves re-composition and never a simple return to the past. Yet in the case of the Arab counter-revolutions, although these have incorporated in some cases elements of mass

support, they have not so incorporated revolutionary *demands* but rather defeated them. To focus on passive revolution, therefore, directs our attention to an overextended concept – whereas counter-revolution is an understudied phenomenon, distinct from *trasformismo*.

If passive revolution represents one way of understanding the outcomes of 2011, another is to see them as hybrids of reform and revolution. In works with identical titles in different languages, Asef Bayat and Fawaz Traboulsi characterise the uprisings as 'revolutions without revolutionaries': effusions of mass protest, to be sure, but lacking in the programmatic clarity and leadership that had distinguished previous revolutionary movements.103 For Bayat, the uprisings represent a novel combination of 'revolutionary mobilizations' and 'reformist trajectories' that were nonetheless radicalised by acts of collective claim-making from below. These struggles, rather than cohere into a challenge to the existing social order, led to the vulnerability of the ensuing to transitions to counter-revolution from within and without.104 The argument put in this book does not dispute this claim of the vulnerability of the revolutions but insists that the other side of the equation, the relative strength of the counter-revolutions, must also be explained. In doing so, I seek to go beyond existing works, such as those of Jean-Pierre Filiu and Gilbert Achcar. Both these authors identify the Arab counter-revolutions with the particularly personalistic forms of authoritarian rule – 'patrimonialism' for Achcar, a modern version of Mamluk rule for Filiu – prevalent in the region.105 Although concurring with Achcar's statement that the Arab uprisings faced not the 'classical binary opposition of revolution and counterrevolution' but rather the dual counter-revolution of the old regimes and Muslim brotherhood, I set this understanding of counterrevolution within broader theories of revolution, expanded in Chapter 2. Having criticised the arguments of others on the Arab revolutions, it is only appropriate here to set out the bases of my own. This book proceeds from my two-decades-long engagement with two interlinked academic and political commitments: the tradition of critical Marxist analysis, on the one hand, and an identification with the struggles for equality and liberation in the Middle East, on the other. Such commitments are of obvious relevance to a work concerning revolution in the Arab world. In making these commitments explicit, I hope to add rather than subtract from the robustness of my conclusions. No work of social inquiry is written without such commitments behind it, and those that maintain otherwise merely render implicit premises that ought to be available for critique.

In adopting a Marxist conceptual framework, I follow Hanna Batatu in seeing 'class' as a relationship, not an *a priori* characteristic or category of person.106 In capitalist societies, the central class relation is the sale and purchase of labour power in order to accumulate value; however, the historical struggle over this relationship generates 'polar' collectivities with particular observable institutions and identities, origins and endpoints.107 Amongst these are such collectivities as the organised and urban working class, and the class of labour-dependent landlords discussed in Chapter 2 as the historical supporters and antagonists of democratising revolutions. The expansion of

capitalist relations is 'uneven and combined', however, meaning that there are no pure examples of such relations or the collectivities they generate.108 Therefore, as I demonstrate in the discussion of sectarianism in counter-revolution, forms of collectivity commonly thought of as precapitalist and primarily symbolic may, in fact, rest on eminently material bases. Moreover, these relations are not confined to the boundaries of one state but, as explicated in Chapter 2, extend to a globally competitive hierarchy of states – a competitive hierarchy that compels not merely military readiness but forms of accumulation necessary to sustain it.

My adoption of such a framework represents a political as much as an intellectual commitment. In relation to the events analysed in this book I was, if not an active participant, certainly not a neutral observer. Much of the material I collected for this book began in conversation with such active participants, and in the visits I made to the region between 2011 and 2015, as well as in solidarity work in the UK. Vesting, from the outside, some of my own political hopes and aspirations in the uprisings may suggest a lack of scholarly neutrality, but, as I have noted, such a thing is, in any case, a chimera. If my – and others'– hope that the uprisings might pass beyond the boundaries of political change into more fundamental social and economic transformation was disappointed, so too were the aspirations of more mainstream democratisation theorists and, indeed, of most Islamists. This commitment has provided the spur to reflection on the aftermath of the revolutions that constitutes this book. This reflection will only be of use to the activists of 2011 and their inheritors if it follows the conventions of scholarly rigour in conceptual coherence and evidential substance. Such are, in any case, the grounds of legitimate intellectual critique – rather than a claimed neutrality concealing implicit premises.

The Argument

The question raised by this reflection, and which this book seeks to answer, is therefore 'why were the Arab counter-revolutions successful?' From this question follow subsidiary enquiries: how did regimes – in at least half of the cases of the Arab revolutions – that appeared so classically coercive, lacking in popular legitimacy, 'patrimonial' and therefore ripe for demise, manage to re-establish themselves?109 Why, nonetheless, did they differ in their trajectories, producing a political revolution in Tunisia, coup and political counter-revolution in Egypt, military counter-revolution in Bahrain, and civil war in Syria, Yemen and Libya? None of these outcomes was foreordained. The answers to them can be sought only in tracing the historical processes, interactive and openended, of the revolutionary uprisings of 2011 and their aftermath. The analytical framework by means of which I both justify the definition of these phenomena as 'revolutions' and specify the nature of the counterrevolutions against them follows in the second chapter. That framework, drawing from the work of Arno Mayer and Charles Tilly, concentrates on the question of how the counter-revolutionaries attempt to go

back to ruling in the old way – or something like it – when a significant proportion of the population are in rebellion against that rule. Successful counter-revolutionaries, I argue, manage to unite a policy of repression, or military conquest, with a political movement that reaches beyond a ruling clique. Through both symbolic and material means, they unify counter-revolution 'from below' and 'above' to build a counterrevolutionary collective subject, creating alliances 'from without' between both states and movements that recompose previously existing regional and international orders.

The story of these revolutions and counter-revolutions holds significance beyond the history of these six states, and indeed beyond the Arab world as a whole. Welcomed at first as the long-awaited extension of the era of global liberalism to a region that had failed to embrace it after the end of the Cold War, they marked instead the very endpoint of that era. The very transformations wrought in and between Arab societies after the Cold War, atomising and disorganising the social forces most favourable to overturning authoritarian regimes, while establishing new regional bonds among competing ruling classes, proved propitious for the counter-revolutionary project.

The counter-revolutions that suppressed the Arab uprisings put paid to the notion of liberal revolutions, revolutions having neither socially transformative aspirations to achieve nor powerful enemies to oppose them, as the route to an anticipated historical endpoint of free-market democracy.110 Such liberal revolutions fell within a historically peculiar habitable zone: one in which powerful working class movements and their allies faced post-agrarian ruling classes (now reliant on abstract domination rather than personal power) that saw no reason to reject their moderate demand for political democracy.

The Arab revolutions were fought by different protagonists. Organised workers were certainly crucial to some of them, such as Tunisia, and there an outcome closer to the 'transition pact' of democratisation emerged. Strike waves of historic proportions also featured in the Egyptian and Bahraini uprisings. For the most part, however, the Arab revolutionaries formed a socially diverse, if largely plebeian, subject that emerged from the informal labour markets and precarious living conditions of the neoliberal *infitah* era. Their social demands were made typically at the level of reproduction (housing, services, and a life free from police oppression) rather than that of production. Peasant struggles over land were notable by their scarcity. The Arab counterrevolutionaries consisted not of a squirely *ancien regime* but a composite financial-security elite integrated with the competing regional sources of capital in the Gulf and outwards to their extra-regional allies. These linkages, and the ideologies of sect, tribe and nation they enabled, were vital for the success – differing in degree and kind, of course – of the counter-revolutions. The historical legacies of previous revolutions from above, conducted against coercive landowners, provided the material for building such linkages and was a source of confusion for outside observers who see 'revolution' as a trans-historical phenomenon.

In Chapter 2, I provide an analytical framework for understanding revolution and counter-revolution as historically specific processes. As I demonstrate, there is always

a tension between these two concepts, reflecting the dual understanding of revolution as, on the one hand, deeply transformative social and political change and, on the other, as mass revolt from below. Working through, rather than attempting to obscure, this tension, I offer a provisional definition of counterrevolution relevant to the Arab Spring as *a project, supported by social movements and international alliances, attempting to reverse a revolution, and by extension to prevent revolutionary movements that have already gained some momentum from coming to power.*111 In so doing, I am guided by the historical sociologist Arno Mayer's approach to the European counter-revolutions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, albeit in a different historical context. In particular, I focus on the process Mayer highlights: how the 'counterrevolutionary's dilemma', of fusing together the elite of the threatened order with a mass base, was solved. Such fusion takes place in revolutionary situations conceived as historically open-ended processes, the explanation of which requires unifying collective action, structural transformation, symbolic and material orders, and domestic and international alliances.112 Counter-revolutions are also bound to particular historical contexts, although not determined by them. Previous instances of counter-revolution drew strongly on the persistent power of coercive landlord classes; in the Arab cases, however, the inheritance of post-colonial revolutions from above that dissolved such classes provided the adhesive to build a counter-revolutionary subject.

To posit the operation of Arab counter-revolutions also means claiming the existence of Arab revolutions. In the third chapter of this book, I substantiate this claim that each of the cases examined – Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Bahrain, Libya and Yemen – constituted profound revolutionary situations. If these revolts did not produce 'a basic transformation of...class structures'113 in the societies concerned, they nonetheless produced profound political changes and frequently alternative political institutions that prefigured or enacted different forms of rule. These matched the competing and incompatible claims to rule defined by Charles Tilly as the *sine qua non* of a revolutionary situation.114 In one state, Tunisia, the result was a fundamental change of political system to an electoral democracy. In another, Egypt, a similar systemic political change, producing the country's first-ever elected presidency, was initiated only to be reversed. In a third, Libya, the head of the old regime, was toppled and elections held but over a fractured polity: a not dissimilar outcome held in Yemen, albeit with more restricted electoral input. In a fifth, Syria, the existing regime was at one point reduced to controlling one-fifth of the country's territory and a variety of new governing institutions – some roughly democratic, others not – temporarily established in the remainder. Only Bahrain failed to witness such changes, but at the high point of the revolt in February 2011, in which security forces lost control of the streets and highways of the country. In each of these, I demonstrate how existing hierarchies of workplace, gender and sect were unsettled and how the revolutionaries prefigured a new form of expanded political self. The question then is not whether these events were revolutions but how those revolutions ended in failure or defeat.

In Chapter 4, I take up the first form of how these revolutionary situations were closed: Tunisia and Egypt, states that experienced political revolution and counter-revolution, respectively. In Egypt, the counter-revolution occurred by the traditional means of military coup, followed by a vigorous campaign of arrest, torture and massacre – first directed against the Muslim brotherhood, then against wider circles of opposition. In Tunisia, such an outcome was avoided only by the political participation and return at the ballot box of the counterrevolutionaries, the *azlam* of Nida Tounes, who formed an administration in coalition with their erstwhile Islamist opponents, Ennahda. Demonstrating how counter-revolutionaries must unite their forces 'from above' and 'below', I show how in Egypt, the co-ordinating core of the military state, the SCAF, was able to rely on the heritage of stateled revolution from above to split the revolutionary coalition and bring a part of it over to support their counter-revolution. The Muslim Brotherhood's willingness in power to suppress the ongoing revolutionary movement added to the counter-revolution. In Tunisia, the *azlam* relied on a similar appeal to secularist nationalism against Ennahda, again drawing on a previous revolution from above that had transformed agrarian relations. The strength of the workers' movement, however, allowed it to broker a compromise, cemented by shared economic policies, between the two. In both cases, I trace how counter-revolution from without operated mainly through financial and diplomatic support but was primarily divided between the Saudi-GCC axis aiming to prevent any form of popular representative democracy as represented in their view by the Muslim Brotherhood and the Qatari-Turkish MB axis likewise seeking to profit from such political revolutions but prevent social ones.

In Chapter 5, I take up the cases where the existing regimes were able to isolate and crush the revolutionary uprisings, albeit at great cost: Syria and Bahrain. In Syria, this consisted of an all-out war by the regime against the territories liberated from its control, combined with a massive campaign of arrests, tortures and assassinations of the original revolutionary activists and the release of Islamist insurgents who would sectarianise the revolt. In Bahrain, the Khalifas adopted a scaled-down version of this policy, complete with the semi-military occupation of restive Shi'a villages, but only once assured the support of the occupying forces of the GCC. In this chapter, therefore, I deal with the question of sect and sectarianism in building a counter-revolutionary subject. In Syria, the regime was less sure of a popular basis but was able to suture the support of many non-Sunnis to the pre-2011 coalition of a new bourgeoisie embedded in the security apparatus and most of the older Sunni business class: a cross-sectarian elite to which sectarianisation nonetheless proved a useful counter-revolutionary strategy. The Bahraini monarchy relied upon far more open sectarian mobilisation of Sunnis, bolstered by the outside help of the GCC. In both of these cases, counter-revolution from without was particularly salient: in Syria, a threefold competition between a Russian-Iranian-Hizballah axis supporting the regime, and an opposing camp divided by Saudi and Qatari-Turkish loyalties. The United States vacillated between the first and second axis – I demonstrate that American policy in Syria was a symptom not of

US hegemony, but decline. In the case of Bahrain, a far more straightforward direct intervention by GCC forces under Saudi leadership was necessary to put an end to the revolutionary situation.

Chapter 5 deals with those cases where neither revolution nor counterrevolution could be said to have triumphed but rather led to state collapse. In Yemen, the unresolved grievances of the unification and civil war of the 1990s were overlaid with a sectarian understanding that transformed the difference between the Shafe'i and Zaydi schools of jurisprudence into a 'sectarian conflict' seen through the gaze of Riyadh, Abu Dhabi and Tehran. In overwhelmingly Sunni Libya, tribal networks (and to some extent 'ethnicity') offered a means of mobilisation for militias on both sides of the civil war although only Field Marshal Haftar claimed the mantle of the 'Libyan National Army' and pre-2011 command structure. As with sects, this chapter expands on 'tribes' as systems of material and symbolic distinction rather than political protagonists. In both of these states, competitive external intervention again played a crucial role. In Libya, the NATO bombing campaign aided the overthrow and eventual murder of Gaddafi but then produced a division between those who wanted, on an Islamist model, completely to restructure the Libyan state and those who wanted partially to preserve or revive it: the latter coalescing around the counter-revolutionary officer Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar. In Yemen, a counter-revolutionary settlement was found under GCC auspices that would, in effect, preserve the old regime while sidelining Ali Abdallah Saleh – resulting in the paradoxical outcome that at least some of those opposing the old regime ended up (temporarily) on the same side as its former figurehead.

In the sixth chapter, I take up those attempts that did emerge at remaking a 'revolutionary' state in Northern Syria: the autonomous administration of 'Rojava' ruled by the PYD and the 'caliphate' of the Islamic State in Iraq and Al-Sham. The first I show to have been the closest thing to a social revolution to have emerged from the uprisings, but fatally flawed by its separation from the wider Syrian revolution (a separation in which the Arab chauvinism of the mainstream opposition played a large part). The second, contrary to most other interpretations, I see as a *counter-revolutionary* force. For although its project of a universal, novel, violent transformation resembles that of previous revolutions, ISIS lacked the popular base that both (outside of liberal ideology) characterised those revolutions *and* actively suppressed that popular revolutionary movement to the benefit – if not always the connivance – of the Assad regime. Indeed, ISIS' success was inconceivable without the counter-revolutionary strategy of the regime it nominally opposed, and the sectarianisation of the Syrian uprising that resulted from it.

In the conclusion, I return to the broader implications of revolution and counter-revolution in the twenty-first century. Beginning with a balance sheet of the counter-revolutionary decade in the Middle East, I return to the global paradox of an increase and broadening in revolutionary *uprisings* since the 1980s accompanied but revolutionary *outcomes*, in the sense of deep social transformation, became almost non-existent. The continued relevance of this insight can be seen in the cycle of struggles of which

the Arab revolutions were seen as a paradigm case: the 2011 'movement of the squares' whose non-hierarchical and spontaneous character was allegedly repeated in protest movements across the decade, leading up to a renewal of the Arab revolutions themselves in Sudan Algeria, Lebanon. Yet these latter uprisings, and it might tentatively be noted the renewed Black rebellion in the United States under the banner of 'Black Lives Matter', seemed to have learned something from the previous movements: that transformation could not be limited just to this or that personnel but could target an entire system.

The lessons of the Arab counter-revolutions for such movements are threefold, I conclude. First, that the moment of transition to limited liberal democracy via mass mobilisation has passed: the separation of political from economic and social transformation has turned into a hardened rejection of even the former. It is no longer possible, as it was in the latter twentieth century, to expect moderate demands of democratisation to be granted so long as more substantive social change is foregone. Second, counter-revolution is no longer to be found amongst the reactionary defenders of a decaying rural order – landlords or clerical obscurantists – but emerges from composite financial and security elites with a significant degree of mass appeal based on previous phases of capitalism, not pre-capitalist society. Finally, international counterrevolution cannot be seen through the mid-twentieth century division between 'imperialist' and 'anti-imperialist' nor on the liberal post-Cold

War of a benevolent US hegemony ushering new democracies into the fold: counter-revolution is equally likely to issue from Washington and from its competitors.

Methods, Argument, Cases

The above argument belongs to the tradition of historical sociology that adopts as its method the comparison of historical cases of revolutionary situations using sociological and political categories – such as class, sect and state form – to develop explanations of the origins and outcomes of those situations. The mode of comparison I use, however, necessarily differs from the most common method used by historical sociologists: the method of similarity and difference derived from John Stuart Mill. The essence of this method consists of the conceptual identification of variables present or absent in a universe of cases of the outcome of interest, and the correlation of these variables with that outcome. The researcher is then able to identify which variables form a minimum of necessary and sufficient conditions for the outcome: so that, for example, we may conclude that revolutions do not occur *without* the presence of a fiscal crisis of the state or cultures of political opposition.

The achievements made by the applications of this method are not to be gainsaid. Nonetheless, I do not adopt it here, choosing instead to conduct an 'incorporated comparison' of the Arab counter-revolutions.115 My reason for so doing derives from the most powerful objection to the Millian approach: that it collapses accounts of histori-

cal processes, which themselves exert an influence on later events, into isolated units that can then be compared with one another for the absence or presence of previously defined variables.116 Although powerful in elucidating the conjunctions of these variables – such as peasant insurrection plus international pressure plus intra-state crisis leads to revolution – this strategy tends to founder on the historical interpenetration of variables and cases. It is inconceivable, for example, that the Chinese revolution of 1949 would have occurred in the way that it did *without* the prior instance of the Russian Revolution of 1917: nor that either would have done so without both the example of the French 1789, nor the global century of state-building, imperialism and capitalist industrialisation it inaugurated.117 For revolutions, and especially counterrevolutions, 'their order is constitutive of their structure'.118

The particularities of the phenomenon of counter-revolution, and of the revolutionary wave that broke in the Arab world in 2011, make this point particularly pertinent. With the exception of Bahrain, all six of the states that experienced revolutionary uprisings in 2011 had been

'populist authoritarian' republics, and undergone a transition – of varying depth – to 'post-populist' forms of rule combined with neoliberal economic policies.119 This 'universe', of Tunisia, Libya, Bahrain, Syria, Egypt and Yemen, also by definition shares an antecedent condition: a revolutionary situation. There had to be a revolution in order for a counterrevolution to occur. The unfolding of these revolutions over time was intertwined with one another: Tunisia gave an example to Egypt, which gave an example to Libya and then to Syria and so on. The interlinking of these sequences is even more marked in the progress of counterrevolutions. Counter-revolutionaries, as Kurt Weyland has noted, learn from the mistakes made by their counter-parts in the earlier stages of waves of revolution and co-ordinate their responses accordingly.120

The Arab counter-revolutions cannot, therefore, be treated as units separate from each other, an analysis of the variations which would then provide generalisable causes for their outcomes. It is not possible to fit them into a quasi-experimental design in which factors are held constant. Nonetheless, their outcomes did indeed differ: how is one to provide an explanation of them that may illuminate problems beyond the history of the cases themselves? I adopt the method of incorporated comparison of these counter-revolutions: the 'cases' are the counter-revolutions themselves, not the states in which they occurred. This is an important distinction, because although the revolutions were directed within and against national political structures – the 'regime' and the 'people' that desired its downfall were conceived in national terms and partook of particular national histories of revolt and rebellion – the revolutions both emerged from and were influenced by global and regional processes.

In speaking of these particular global and regional historical processes, how far can the experiences of the Arab revolutions be generalised? The universe of counter-revolutions studied in this book is limited, and as I demonstrate in the following chapter, revolutions are series of events rather than entities in their own right. They cannot be understood outside of their historical context, which they also illuminate. In

the case of the Arab revolutions, that context is the history of *infitah*: the turn away from models of state-led national development and towards policies of privatisation, free-market reform and a merging of private wealth with state power.121 Of course, that regional turn formed part of a global tendency later denoted by the – somewhat capacious – concept of 'neoliberalism'.122 This era, which preceded the revolutions, weakened the social forces most often associated with both social revolutions of the classic kind, and more limited political revolutions for democracy: the organised labour movement, and a rebellious poor or landless peasantry.123

This regional instance of a global process of structural transformation produced three main results: the disorganisation and 'precariatisation' of wage-earners, the transformation, and indeed downgrading, of the 'agrarian question' with different effects in different countries, and the promotion of circuits of accumulation whose core in the Middle East lay in the oil-producing Gulf, both the Sunni Arab monarchical autocracies and the Shi'a Islamic Republic of Iran. These results provided propitious grounds – not inevitable success – for counter-revolution.

By setting out this incorporated comparative approach to the substantive cases to answer the question of the counter-revolutionary's dilemma, I attempt to get beyond a series of binary distinctions in the social science of revolutions – that between structures and agents, between material and symbolic orders, and politics within versus politics between states.124 The Arab revolutions, I argue, broke out because of a structural crisis: that of the *infitah* era. They marked, therefore, an inflection point: not the consummation of the rights-based revolutions of the 'long 1990s', but their ending. The reaction against those policies provided not, for the most part, a vision of the future beyond them, but largely a form of nostalgia for the past of national independence and state-led development that preceded them, or of their Islamist mirror image. The confluence of global liberalism and US predominance that marked the first decade after the fall of the Soviet Union had, by 2011, been replaced by a more varied topography of international and regional alliances: competing power centres in the Gulf between Iran and Saudi Arabia, overlain with the regional ambitions of Qatar and Turkey and a renewed rivalry between Russian and the United States. As a consequence, the centrifugal effect of revolutions on international alliances, pitting counterrevolutionary intervention against besieged revolutionaries, was replaced by competing alliances of counter-revolutionary force.

Yet, as the claim that 'another world was possible' indicates, none of this necessarily led to the triumph of counter-revolutions. These were the result of open-ended contests between particular collective subjects, constituted through and not before the revolutionary moments, which were bound together by both material and symbolic appeals. Sectarian identification, as well as the dichotomy between 'secularism' and Islamism, formed a vital part of the forging of such subjects – but these were neither un-changing and pre-existing identities nor operative on the purely symbolic realm. In states such as Syria or Bahrain, for example, sectarianism was a material as much as a symbolic relationship. Likewise, the claim of the Egyptian SCAF to be defending a

Nasserist inheritance against the Muslim Brotherhood found an audience in the independent trade union movement as much because of a symbolic identification of the role of Egyptian workers in national-developmentalism as of any material consideration.

Nor is it possible to divide domestic from international factors in the building of counter-revolutionary subjects. Where, as Eric Selbin has demonstrated, revolutionary narratives offer 'compelling stories' in which the revolutionary subject is the protagonist,125 the counter-revolutionary one is one of reaction, reversion and defence. The hero of the counterrevolutionary narrative is, almost always, the state in its violent and coercive form: the nation conceived as a continuous, organic and inviolate community whose social arrangements nonetheless require constant vigilance and defence binds the alliance of counter-revolution from above and below. Not only the structural crisis of *infitah* but the long-term experience of inter-societal hierarchy, in the trauma of attempts to 'catch-up' or regain past status embodied in Nasserism or Ba'athism, gives social substance to counter-revolutionary narratives of the nation as embattled historical subject. In a shorter time-scale, the particular policies adopted by counterrevolutionary states – the forms of military, diplomatic or financial support they extend – often proved decisive to a particular revolutionary situation. In the chapters that follow, I seek to trace those policies and their success: the story of how the open-ended processes of revolutionary uprising in 2011 became instances of renewed authoritarianism and civil war. The sources on which I rely are mainly secondary ones, leavened with interviews, speeches and news reports. I have also relied upon collections of personal testimony. This choice of sources reflects not an absence of data from the Arab revolutions but rather an overabundance: the easy availability of smartphones and social media made these the most recorded revolutions in human history. In the face of this flood of primary evidence, and constrained by the necessity of drawing some form of comparative conclusions about the cases, I have relied on the prior sifting efforts of others – choosing historical-sociological breadth over ethnographic and archival depth.

The objective of this historical comparison is not to insist on any inevitability either of the course of the revolutionary process or its outcome but rather to find the reasons for those outcomes in the historical narrative, in the context of the structural transformation that preceded them. Those reasons reflect contingency and interaction but within an overall frame, both inherited from the past and reconstituted during the revolutionary period. At the heart of this endeavour lies the problem of counter-revolutionaries seeking to maintain or restore their rule over a society that has risen against them.

2. What Is Counter-Revolution?

'A flock must be led by a shepherd'.1 Thus preached 'Blind Ali', the Istanbul muezzin who led a surly crowd to the Yildiz Palace, the seat of Ottoman government, on 6 October 1908. The 'shepherd' on whom Blind Ali called was the Sultan Abdulhamid II, and the direction in which he wished for his herd to be led was away from the 'Young Turk' revolution of the preceding summer. For Ali and his followers, this revolution, led by the 'Committee for Union and Progress' (CUP), threatened the status of *shari'a* and the Muslim supremacy it ensured: rather than fending off Christian domination, it imported it within. The CUP dealt briskly with this challenge. Ali was executed, his followers and their assemblies dispersed. Yet the new regime was far from assured. The following April, a revolt of the Rifle Division, inspired by a noncommissioned member of the 'Society of Muhammad' and combined with a crowd of lower *ulema* and religious students, laid siege to the newly re-established parliament with cries of 'the *shari'a* is in danger, we want *shari'a*!'2 Abdulhamid pardoned their rebellion, turning a mutiny into a counter-revolution. The putsch, or rather counter-putsch, opened two weeks of chaos in Istanbul and the wider reaches of the Ottoman Empire, inciting sectarian pogroms in the cities of Adana, Aleppo and elsewhere. Only once reliable regiments returned from the Balkans to Istanbul in late April, and Abdulhamid deposed in favour of his more ductile brother, did the CUP count itself secure once more.

The '31st of March incident'3 is not widely known beyond the ranks of

Ottomanists – but together with similar events in Iran a year earlier, it represented the first attempt at counter-revolution in the Middle East. These upsurges formed a part of a worldwide wave of constitutionalist revolutions at the turn of the twentieth century, including the Portuguese revolution, the Iranian constitutional revolution, the Chinese and Mexican revolutions and the Russian revolution of 1905. Most of these revolutions, suspended between the liberal intellectuals who led them and the social struggles they unleashed, succumbed to counterrevolution in one form or another.4 Taken, in the twentieth century as mere prodromes of the explosions of 1917 (in Russia) and 1949 (in China), counter-revolutions such as that of 1909, in fact, offer instructive examples of the phenomenon, its innate connection with and circumscription of its antagonist, revolution, and of the transformations of both in the century between the Young Turks and the Arab Spring.

At first blush, the 31st of March incident looks rather typical of the nineteenth-century counter-revolutionary coups against nascent liberal constitutional orders in Europe: an alliance of throne, sword and altar (or in this case, *minbar*) to reverse a

programme of reforming meritocracy. The CUP had purged from the Ottoman armed forces 'ranker' officers lacking European technical training and sought to impose conscription on hitherto exempt groups of religious scholars. Such men, abetted by lower *ulema*, formed the core of the 1909 revolt.5 In other words, the counter-revolution was made against an existing revolutionary power – albeit one rooted in a part of the state, the CUP's in control of the armed forces – rather than one struggling to be born. As we shall see, this conception of revolution, as defined by its results and of counterrevolution as the futile response of pre-modern reactionaries to revolution, has hampered understanding of the Arab counter-revolutions after 2011.

The Hamidian counter-revolution is instructive in another way – in demonstrating the necessity for counter-revolutionaries to unite, in Arno Mayer's terms, the 'classes' and the 'masses'.6 Both popular and populist, the counter-revolution attracted very wide strata of support in Istanbul and some of the provinces. The adherents of the Society of Muhammad attracted to their banner 'artisans, merchants, coffee-house proprietors, public bath-keepers, fishermen', peasants and tribesmen.7 The counter-revolutionary spring of 1909 established two of the conceptions of modernity that would appear and reappear throughout the Middle East in the following century. Undemocratic but secular military nationalists, on the one hand, and popular Islamic cultural conservatives, on the other, would meet, cooperate, clash and mutate in the region up to 2011 and beyond. This history notwithstanding, the counterrevolutionaries of 1909 and of 2011, and their counterparts in all other revolutionary situations, faced the same dilemma: how to win enough support, from above and below, from inside and outside the state, to recompose a cracked and reeling old order?

The possible answers to this question are not foreordained, and the strategies that result from them provide for different outcomes to revolutions, whether the founding of a new order, the refashioning of the old or the irremediable collapse of both. Nonetheless, the 31st of March incident offers two further parallels with the Arab counter-revolutions after

2011. Opposed to the disorder wrought by the CUP and its allies, and seeking to reverse their reformist programme, the counterrevolutionaries themselves indulged in violent disorder to impose a programme of their own. At its heart lay the practice – material as much as symbolic – of religious distinction between Muslims, Christians and Jews. Such forms of identity offer a means to build the alliances necessary to triumph over socially heterogeneous and politically unstable revolutionary movements. These counter-revolutionary alliances, whether in 1909 or after 2011, are not restricted to the boundaries of a state in revolutionary upheaval. Both the revolution and the counter-revolution were international – in George Lawson's terms, 'inter-social' – from the beginning.8 For both the CUP and their enemies, the overriding aim was to save the Empire from collapse and dismemberment: a fate that awaited other constitutional revolutions of the early twentieth century, crushed between insurgent workers and peasants, on the one hand, and revitalised landlords, industrialists and their allies amongst the competing Great Powers, on the other.9

In this chapter, I establish why it was crucial for the Arab counterrevolutionaries after 2011 to solve – unlike their Hamidian forebears – the problem faced by all counter-revolutionaries: how to unite the 'antirevolution from below' with the 'counter-revolution from above' and then how to suppress a revolution with a social base of support behind it. I demonstrate that counter-revolution can only be grasped through a conception of revolution that does not take revolutionary success as its sole criterion. Seen in this light, as I demonstrate in the subsequent chapters of the book, the Arab uprisings constituted one of the broadest and deepest revolutionary waves in history – hence the scale of the counter-revolutions required to suppress them. Counter-revolution, I argue below, depends upon the distinction between political and social revolutions. The separation of political (in this instance, democratising) from social (transformative) revolutions in the latter half of the twentieth century, emerging from a particular historical constellation of social forces, laid the basis for the Arab counter-revolutions. Before outlining this schema to understand the phenomenon, however, we must address a simpler question – what is counter-revolution?

Revolution and Counter-Revolution: Revolution by Outcome versus Revolutionary Situations

To ask the question 'what is counter-revolution' is to pose another, more familiar one – what is a revolution? Counter-revolutions cannot occur without revolutions, and the former set the boundaries for and determine, in part, the success or failure of the latter. The two are not merely interlinked but superposed. Social scientists are accustomed to observing regularities of rules and roles, in which people behave according to material or cultural norms and heed well-established hierarchies. The very character of a revolution consists of those hierarchies, rules and roles being placed in flux. Future, present and past social orders exist in the same place and at the same time, until a revolutionary situation is resolved and the pathway from the past to the present retrospectively hardened.10

The predominant view of revolution relies upon exactly such a procedure of historical hardening. Revolution, it seems to make sense to say, means a lasting and deep change in a given society and state. Revolutions mark a caesura between the old and the new within the lifespan of their participants and observers. 'A revolution', writes Perry Anderson, is 'an episode of convulsive political transformation, compressed in time and concentrated in target, that has a determinate beginning – when the old state apparatus is still intact – and a finite end, when that apparatus is decisively broken and a new one erected in its stead'.11 Powerful and lucent, this definition offers us a beginning – the old state in place, a middle – the 'convulsive' episode, and an end – the new state apparatus secured. Silent on the character of that apparatus or the nature of the convulsion that founds it, however, Anderson's definition misses the particularity of revolution that has so inspired its opponents and terrified its enemies: the combination of popular insurrection with lasting overthrow of the prevailing social and political conditions in a given society. This combination, historically unknown before the early modern period, has entered social-scientific understanding through Theda

Skocpol's now-canonical definition of revolutions as 'rapid, basic transformations of a society's state and class structures ... accompanied by, and in part carried through by, class-based revolts from below'.12

This understanding of revolution, which renders both failed revolution and successful counter-revolution an impossibility, has resulted in a relative scarcity of research on the latter in the otherwise capacious body of social-scientific work on revolution. In part, this neglect derived from the Cold War definition of revolution as simply a form of extrainstitutional political violence, whatever the content of that violence, its perpetrators or objectives: '[c]ounter-revolution is revolution', in the words of Peter Calvert.13 More considered work on revolution – often divided into four 'generations' – has also turned comparatively little attention towards counter-revolution.14 The seminal works of the 'third' and 'fourth' generation, those of Theda Skocpol and Jack Goldstone, respectively, tend to treat counter-revolution as empirically important but analytically absent.15 The most comprehensive reader – in four volumes – on revolution as critical concept in political science includes not a single excerpt on the topic of counterrevolution.16 The text devoted to the subject in the *Encyclopaedia of Political Revolutions,* spans two pages – a few paragraphs more than the preceding entry, on Costa Rica.17 With notable and useful exceptions, discussed further below, this neglect of counter-revolution has continued in the study of revolution, reflecting the persistent influence of Skocpol's definition of the phenomenon.

To restrict thus the meaning of the term 'revolution' to successful instances of social or political transformation offers parsimony. How, after all, would one begin to explain the origins or identify the consequences of a revolution if one cannot be sure if such a thing has occurred? As noted in the previous chapter, it is precisely by the yardstick of successful transformation that the Arab revolutions have been judged wanting and the Arab counter-revolutions, therefore, obscured from analytical view. To retrieve them for such an analysis requires a suppler definition of revolutions than that reliant solely on a successful outcome. At stake here is not just the definition of counter-revolution but the temporal status of revolution. A usable concept of counter-revolution requires a further understanding of the relationship between the period of the revolutionary episode – which, as Donatella Della Porta demonstrates in her study 'eventful democratisation', participants experience as one of especial intensity and possibility – and the (relatively) more settled time that precedes and succeeds it.18 Yet neither the pre-revolutionary nor the post-(counter) revolutionary period should be seen solely through Walter Benjamin's contrast between 'homogenous empty time' and the time of revolution 'filled by the presence of the now'.19 'Events', write Massimiliano Tomba, 'need to be thought simultaneously in a historical and in a non-historical way: historical, because they belong to the past; non-historical, because they leap out of the past as a possible future'.20 Counter-revolutions are difficult to circumscribe because they both belong to the past that preceded the revolution and make the future that succeeds it. Or to put the issue in more prosaic language: when does counter-revolution

begin? And, what does it counter–does counterrevolution simply restore the past or make its own new present? What does counter-revolution preserve?

These are necessary questions for any investigation of the Arab counter-revolutions, because they delineate the object of enquiry. Why, for example, focus only on the six states discussed in this book and not those – such as Morocco or Jordan – which faced substantial protest movements and adopted similar mixtures of repression and co-option to deal with them? What makes a particular regime 'counter-revolutionary' when its personnel, ideological justification form of operation differ – as in the most extreme case, that of ISIS, profoundly – from that of the pre2011 era?

The central concept that will be used in this book to delineate revolutionary episodes from the periods of rule that precede and follow them is that of the *revolutionary situation*. The concept of a revolutionary situation allows us to distinguish counter-revolution from general policies of government repression even when these are adopted in a time of revolutionary upheaval. To return to the contrast mentioned earlier, Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Bahrain, Libya and Yemen all experienced revolutionary situations in 2011. Morocco and Jordan, although facing widespread and impressive protest movements, did not. The difference between these states was summed up by Lenin in his famous definition of a revolutionary situation: when '"the lower classes [do] not to want" to live in the old way' and the '"upper classes [are] ... unable" to live in the old way'.21 Such a situation produces, in the words of another Russian revolutionary, 'double sovereignty', the overcoming of which 'becomes at every new step the task of the revolution – or the counter-revolution'.22 Revolutionary situations, as Lenin and Trotsky's predecessor Marx argues, establish competing sovereignties and are recognised as such by both revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries and therefore conflict – 'only power can decide between two powers'.23 The outcome of that contest is not pre-determined.

This concept of revolutionary situation, originating with classical Marxism, has been adopted by the later social-scientific literature on revolution. The most concise definition of a revolutionary situation is Charles Tilly's: the appearance of 'at least two distinct blocs of contenders [who] make incompatible claims to control the state, and some significant portion of the population subject to the state's jurisdiction [that] acquiesces in the claims of each bloc'.24 Revolutionary situations are distinct and comparatively brief periods of time in which these competing claims to sovereign control are unresolved. This is Anderson's 'convulsive' episode. Not just political forms of rule but the social order these protect come into question in revolutionary situations, especially when one of the contending claims relies not just on Tilly's passive acquiescence of the mass of the population but their active mobilisation. Mona el-Ghobashy, defining the revolutionary situation as 'a different understanding of revolution, not as a purposive project by a revolutionary class but as a conjuncture of acute political struggle over state powers', applies the concept to Egypt between 2011 and

2013.25 In the rest of this book, I extend such an analysis to the other cases of the Arab revolutions, showing how each constituted a revolutionary situation that was then closed by a particular kind of counterrevolution.

Understanding revolutionary situations in this way allows us to link the question of revolution and counter-revolution to the distinction between social and political revolutions. The latter distinction – more widely accepted than the former – refers in Skocpol's words to the difference between social revolutions as 'rapid basic transformations of a society's state and class structures' featuring 'the coincidence of societal structural change with class upheaval' and political revolutions as 'political transformations that are not accompanied by transformations of class relations'.26 Neil Davidson offers a clearer contrast: 'political revolutions take place *within* a socioeconomic structure and social revolutions involve a *change from* one socioeconomic structure to another'.27

Distinguishing between social and political revolution helps provide the answer to the question 'what do counter-revolutionaries counter?' A new social order, a new political structure or both?

Although widely shared in the literature on revolution, however, this distinction between social and political revolution is neither universally accepted nor endowed with the same content. Steven Pincus, for example, argues that only the 'self-conscious' and popular 'transformation of the socioeconomic orientation and of the political structures' of a given society can be considered revolutionary.28 In this reading, there is no such thing as a political revolution – only the strikingly rare category of social revolution counts as a revolution. Admirably rigorous though this objection may be, it falls prey to the same problem as those definitions of revolutions exclusively dependent on outcomes rather than processes. If a substantial part of the populace self-consciously attempts, but fails, to transform 'the socioeconomic orientation' of the society in which they live, ending up with only a change in 'political structures', how is this to be understood? If the reasons for the failure of such transformation are excluded, then those for the successful cases – Pincus' real revolutions – cannot be adequately given either, being excluded from any comparison with unsuccessful ones.

Moreover, the distinction between political and social revolutions is also one apparent in the actions and ideas of revolutionaries themselves. Della Porta has demonstrated how even in 1989 in Eastern Europe, leaders and participants in the movements sought a quite different form of society to the one that eventually emerged from the collapse of the Stalinist bloc. Such forms of 'eventful democratisation' brought about by intense bouts of mass protest, animated by visions of transformation beyond the merely political, also tend to produce more vibrant and democratic political structures even if those visions are defeated.29 Participants in the Arab revolutions were well aware of the interdependence of social and political revolution: hence the comment of one former Egyptian Muslim Brother that 'successful control cannot happen before real social justice is established, because otherwise the country would be run for the benefit of rich people'.30 A profound practical understanding of the distinction between

political and social revolutions was demonstrated by the second wave uprisings in the Arab world in 2019, concentrated in Lebanon, Iraq, Algeria and Sudan. Learning from the fate of their predecessors, all of these revolts foregrounded the need for a total overhaul of both state structures and the underlying inequalities they reflected and preserved.31

To maintain the distinction between social and political revolutions does not mean ascribing the same content to its terms. Lawson defines revolutions as 'attempts to quickly and forcibly overthrow an existing regime' across three dimensions – the symbolic, political and economic. Political revolutions in this reading consist of the 'overthrow of the old regime' and reconstruction of systems of governance'; the symbolic that 'destroy[s] prerevolutionary tropes' and creates 'new forms of symbolic order'; the economic 'recast[s] relations of production, value and exchange'.32 Lawson's definition echoes Jack Goldstone's understanding of revolution as 'an effort to transform the political institutions and justifications for political authority in a society'.33 The birth of the Islamic Republic in Iran after the 1979 revolution offers such an instance of complete transformation of a symbolic order. A Cihan Tugal notes 'its electrifying message shook the region... as threat to which regional elites had to respond in some co-ordinated way'.34 The Islamic Republic unquestionably transformed that political structures, justification for authority and the experience of everyday life – not least in the imposition of more repressive gender roles – compared with the *ancien regime* of the Shah.

In this sense, the Islamic Revolution was a real and profound one. The Islamic Revolution also brought to power a different social group to the Pahlavi ruling class, the activist clergy rallied behind Khomeini and its allies in the traditional merchants of the urban bazaar. All Islamist trends seeking the forcible overthrow of existing regimes and their replacement with some form of Islamic state (if not 'the' Islamic state) have been influenced by this experience, the virulent anti-Shi'ism of some such factions, not withstanding. When ISIS seized the oilproducing areas of Eastern Syria in 2014, a similar turnover occurred: men who had been 'illiterate and working in agriculture, often in debt' suddenly had access to 'millions of Syrian pounds' as commanders of Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS.35

Such drastic changes in forms of rule and their accompanying ideological justification undoubtedly represent thoroughgoing political revolutions. Yet such revolutions – although they may completely change the personnel of the ruling class and the ideas and daily practices that underpin its rule – do not transform what Robert Brenner refers to as the 'rules of reproduction' of the society in which they occur.36 Social counter-revolution preserves or reinstates those rules of reproduction. *Social* counter-revolution can, therefore, be accompanied by *political* revolution. The 'net effect' of the profoundly transformative Islamic revolution in Iran, for example, after ten years was the victory of 'smallscale, predominantly merchant capitalism' rather than the overthrow of capitalism itself.37 In order to maintain newly achieved power threatened by economic crisis and instability, political revolutionaries still require that workers go to

work, that tenants pay their landlords, that oil reaches and arrives from global markets licit or illicit, and – unless they are willing to risk international confrontation – that their state creditors are reassured.

Beyond this, whatever the form of legitimacy at the top of a state, postrevolutionary institutions tend to retain not just their old personnel linked by ties of patronage or common social origin to the old regime but also the habits of command and obedience upon which it rested.38 During revolutionary situations, participants typically experience a sense of expanded, collective selfhood that offers new horizons of political and social organisation, as well as actually existing examples of the same.39 Phenomena such as the Egyptian *tathir* (labour actions aimed at 'cleansing' enterprises and institutions of their Mubarak-era managers) or the Yemeni 'parallel revolution' represent attempts to overturn such structures. Social revolutions thus transform not just the personnel who occupy these relationships but the relationships themselves. The economic crises and downturns that usually accompany revolutions, and were particularly visible in Egypt and Tunisia, emerge from the contradiction between these imperatives and continuing mass mobilisations. To ignore such imperatives means to side with, organise and rely upon mass mobilisation in a way that tends to social revolution: to accept them means to repress the mobilisation and, therefore, turn a political revolution into a social counter-revolution.

Political revolutions, it should be noted here, do not refer solely to the transition from authoritarianism to parliamentary or presidential democracy. As discussed in the previous chapter, it was this form of political revolution or 'transition' that was most eagerly expected to take place in the Arab world after 2011. Yet although democratic transition can be a form of political revolution, it is not the only one. Insurrectionary movements may violently re-organise existing states away from democratic forms into authoritarian ones. In this sense, Italian Fascists and German Nazis were correct in describing their aims as 'national revolution' – the aim of which was a more thoroughgoing *counter-revolution* against the threat of socialist revolution than democratic forms of rule could provide.40 As I demonstrate in the later section of this chapter, the predominance of democratic transition as a form of political revolution between the late 1970s and early 2010s reflected a particular global conjuncture of social forces: on the one hand, expanding but nonrevolutionary movements and, on the other, declining, but no longer anti-democratic landlords. The horizon between social and political revolution shifted once more with the Arab revolutions – the counterrevolutions against them with the exception of Tunisia, being mounted against both political and (potential) social revolution.

Of course, the 'social' of a social revolution is not composed solely of economic relationships. When revolutionary situations upturn accustomed hierarchies of wealth and political power, they also do so for those of gender, age, racial, national or religious identification. Nor do these hierarchical and oppressive relationships represent a merely symbolic order appended to a fundamentally economic infrastructure: not the least of these being the role of gender in social reproduction.41 Revolutionary mobilisation, in

which women have played a central role at least since the first modern revolutions of the seventeenth century, unsettle the enduring structures of gender subordination in the family and their associated forms of sexuality.42 The Arab revolutions very much conformed to this pattern.43

The defence of family, custom and patriarchy – as well as the practice and fantasy of extreme misogynist violence against revolutionary women perceived as upsetting such hierarchies – has thus formed a typical if not universal aspect of counter-revolution.44 No simple equivalence can be drawn, however, between revolutionary movement and the abolition of the hierarchy of gender, in itself a far from stable or solid category. Val Moghadam describes as 'the patriarchal model of revolution' those revolutions, such as those that ended Eastern European Stalinism in 1989 or the Islamic Revolution in Iran a decade earlier, that rolled back preexisting standards of gender equality under their respective old regimes.45 As discussed later, this perspective is closely connected to the history of modernising nationalist regimes in the Middle East, which adopted limited forms of gender equality as part of their revolutions from above: a contradictory inheritance that rendered 'women's bodies objects of control by different actors', revolutionary and counter-revolutionary after 2011 to 'distinguish the past from the present in processes of political and social change'.46

Social revolutions, therefore, overturn the 'rules of [social] reproduction' of which gender relations are an integral and not just symbolic part – social counter-revolutions defend or re-instate them. Political revolutions, although they transform the structure, personnel or legitimising ideology of the state, do not necessarily promote and may even impede social revolution.

This spectrum of potential transformation returns us to the chronological distinction between revolutionary situation and revolutionary outcome. Jeffery Webber describes a 'revolutionary epoch' as one in which 'revolutionary transformation is possible but not predetermined' and characterised by the 'uncertainty–and, yet, not wide openness–of alternative outcomes'. Social revolution, by contrast, is 'more concerned with accounting for and measuring *the depths and consequences* of lasting structural change which have been successfully won'.47 Revolutionary situations in which state power breaks down and is contested are historically common: social revolutions in which lasting structural change is achieved relatively rare. This mismatch suggests something is happening in between the revolutionary situation and its eventual outcome that militates against lasting structural change. That something, I argue at least in some cases, is counter-revolution.

Counter-revolutions, then, represent not just long-term policies or short-term repression. Rather they are elements of and attempts to close a revolutionary situation on terms favourable – but not identical to – the old order. Revolution is not going on all the time, and therefore neither is counter-revolution. Class struggle, or politics waged by aspirant revolutionaries or counter-revolutionaries, may be, but this is distinct from the convulsive episode of the revolutionary situation. To set these temporal bounds to counter-revolution is not to imply, however, that revolutions and

counter-revolutions burst forth without connection to the past that precedes them or the future that comes after. Revolutionary situations, as George Lawson notes, are processes, 'particular sequences...of events' that are 'always contextually shaped'.48 These episodes also represent crisis moments within longer processes of events: 'turning points' in Andrew Abbot's term, to which subsequent trajectories can be traced with the advantage of historical hindsight.49 The relationship between process and event can only be judged with hindsight. Revolutions as such do not exist as revolutions until they are constituted through the process of the revolutionary situation – in which counter-revolutions are themselves constituted as the opposition to revolution. Counter-revolutions typically close the open historical moment of the revolutionary situation, through demobilisation and (often extreme) repression. Counterrevolutions, such as those that took place in Germany in 1848 or 1919, have therefore often been represented as turning points where 'history failed to turn'.50

Implicit in this characterisation is the idea that a clear path lies ahead of the turning point – usually pointing towards parliamentary democracy accompanied by free-market capitalism – from which other pathways represent a deviation. This notion of a *Sonderweg* or 'special path' to a non-democratic modernity has been generalised from its German context to underpin the accounts for the absence of liberal democracy in the Arab world that appeared confirmed by the aftermath of the 2011 revolts. Yet, as I demonstrate later, the 'special path' is not special at all but rather the more common route to capitalist (if non-democratic) modernity. Counter-revolution is not just a turning point missed but a path taken in its own right. Having established the context in which counterrevolution occurs, we may now turn to a more substantial definition of what it is – and is not.

Counter-Revolution and Its Cognates: Thermidor, Counter-Insurgency, Passive Revolution

What minimum content might unite such phenomena beneath a common definition of counter-revolution? Dan Slater and Nicholas Rush Smith's 'collective and reactive efforts to defend the status quo' with its 'dominant elites' in the face of 'credible threat to overturn them from below' is a good starting point so long as it is acknowledged that 'dominant elites' may extend beyond those in power and 'the status quo' refer to wider social as well as political order.51 Fred Halliday's treatment of counter-revolution as 'a policy of trying to reverse a revolution' but also, crucially, prevention of 'revolutionary movements that have already gained some momentum from coming to power' offers both concision and temporal breadth but restricts the phenomenon to a 'policy'.52 Nick Bisely's understanding is more indeterminate: 'efforts to overthrow a revolutionary state' and to attempts to prevent such a state from emerging.53 Counter-revolution in these definitions hovers between the broad 'effort' and the narrower 'policy'.

It is here that return to the concept of a revolutionary situation is most useful. Counter-revolution, as the term will be used in this book, means the closure, attempted or successful, of a revolutionary situation on terms favourable to the old order – in either its narrow political, or broader social sense. Counter-revolution, there-

fore, depends on the existence of a prior revolutionary situation but is not solely limited to the restoration of the rule that preceded it: indeed, the regimes that emerge from counter-revolution are themselves typically revolutionised, transformed versions of their pre-revolutionary forebears. Even counter-revolutions that emerge from within the revolutionary ranks themselves, after power has been achieved, seek to establish their own stable reproduction on the terms of the surrounding (usually international) vestiges of the old order they originally overturned. *Counter-revolution is therefore a project that thus involves both a policy and a movement to reverse revolution or close a revolutionary situation.*

Accompanying this policy is a movement of counter-revolution from below constituted by popular mobilisations against fundamental structural change, in often-confused enmity to the revolutionaries or a part amongst them. No mere conspiracy of the upper fractions of a society, counter-revolution reaches far down to build and reflect mass support. The more material and symbolic resources available to counterrevolutionaries to do this, the more successful they are likely to be. The narrower the appeal to counter-revolution from below, for example, where based on the pre-eminence of a sectarian minority, the greater the necessity for counter-revolutionaries to rely upon their external allies to bolster a directly military means of suppressing the revolutionary situation.

Revolutionary situations, consisting of the emergence of dual power provoked by mass insurrection, thus only rarely result in revolutionary outcomes. Such outcomes as do issue from revolutionary situations vary from a mere change of governing personnel or apparatus all the way to the most profound changes in everyday life and social relations. Counterrevolutionaries intervene, successfully or unsuccessfully, at any of these points. A counter-revolution seeks to put an end to the revolutionary situation, restoring singular rather than dual power. A counterrevolution may be mounted against a revolution that has succeeded in establishing its rule: a process of civil war and overthrow, most often enlisting the support of outside powers. The defence of a limited political revolution may consist of the counter-revolutionary prevention of a social one. Even if social transformation is to some degree achieved, a version of the old order may be restored under the sign of the new.

Posing counter-revolution in this way places the focus on the ending of a revolutionary situation, particularly by forces associated with the old regime. There is another form of counter-revolution, however, historically just as common as the former but occurring with decreasing frequency as its premise – social revolution – has declined. This form of counter-revolution, which we may refer to as 'Thermidor' after the original French case, refers to the reversion, after its establishment, of a new social order to the practices of the old, even if the proponents of this reversal emerge from the ranks of the revolutionaries.54 In this form, revolution consists of the change to a new form of economy and society and, therefore, counter-revolution consists of the undoing of this change: the model of the French Revolution through which Marxist critiques of the Soviet Union have also typically explained the rise of Stalinism.55 A social revolu-

tion calls forth a social counter-revolution. The form of the political apparatus and its apparent ideological justification – republicanism in the case of the French revolution, Soviet rule and socialism in the case of the Russian – remains the same even if its content is transformed.

This kind of counter-revolutions, distinct from those that are both political and social, represents the classic form of reaction to revolution as mass, transformative movement: we might then call these 'Burkean' counter-revolutions in honour of their earliest and foremost proponent.56 If in a revolutionary situation there is a sustained mass movement that begins or threatens a fundamental transformation of the basic institutions of a state and society, then the Burkean counter-revolutions consist of the policies and movements that oppose such transformations and, therefore, seek to defeat and repress that mass movement. The outcome of the contest between these cannot be determined in advance. The revolution may be defeated wholesale and return to the *ancien régime* (although always a changed version of it) achieved; or the revolution may consolidate itself and form a new political (and possibly social) order with new forms of legitimation; or there may be a compromise of negotiation, producing a political but not social transformation, or an outcome of mutual exhaustion and collapse. If the revolutionaries achieve power, and the foundation of a new order begins, then this type of counterrevolution implies an attack against that order from within and without. Attempts of the latter kind are very common in the historical record but successful instances are hard to achieve – it is difficult to dislodge a revolutionary state once established, and counter-revolutionary external intervention is far likelier to succeed if it occurs during the revolutionary situation and not against an established outcome.

The Arab counter-revolutions have resembled mostly this kind of counter-revolution. They were far from homogenous, however. The Thermidorian kind of counter-revolution, counter-revolution 'on the terrain of revolution' in Giles Dauvé's words, faced no established transformation of social relations to reverse.57 Analogues may nevertheless be found in those parts of the opposition to the *anciens regimes* (including branches of the Muslim Brotherhood and their backers in Turkey and Qatar) that sought to gain from political revolutions at the expense of the social demands of the mass uprisings that had brought them about. So long as there remains a distinction between political and social revolutions – a distinction present not just in theoretical reflection but, as demonstrated earlier, in the practice and consciousness of revolutionary participants themselves – there will also be the potential for political revolutionaries to act at the same time as social counter-revolutionaries. The Thermidorian idea of counter-revolution also belongs to the 'regime of historicity' produced by the revolutionary traditions of 1789 and 1917. This 'regime of historicity' made it possible to conceive of oneself as a revolutionary (or to be conceived of as a counterrevolutionary) in relation to that event and its proclaimed successors.58 One could be a revolutionary, or a counter-revolutionary, outside of a revolutionary conflagration, provided one acted either to promote or prevent 'the revolution' in general. Revolution, in this sense, is an ongoing trend or movement at least in the epoch

defined by such successful social revolutions as 1789 or 1917 and counter-revolution such as the policies– as for, example, repression of demonstrations, co-optation of leaders and so on – that seek to reverse that trend. The idea is put most succinctly by the Left Marxist Karl Korsch opposing *both* the Stalinist and Fascist regimes of the 1930s: counter-revolution meant 'counteraction of the united capitalist class against all that remains today of the results of that first great insurrection of the proletarian forces of war-torn Europe which culminated in the Russian October of 1917...[and] same time ...a series of "preventive" measures of the ruling minority against... new revolutionary dangers'.59 Counter-revolution in this understanding extends throughout an entire historical period. It is the policy pursued by counter-revolutionaries, just as 'revolution' is the policy pursued regard- less of the presence or absence of a revolutionary situation.

Congruent with this version of counter-revolution is the identification of the former with the tactics often used to pursue, in particular those of counter-insurgency. Thus, Bernard Harcourt characterises, reprising an argument of Michel Foucault's, the transformation of US policing into a form of counter-insurgency – as practised in Iraq and Afghanistan – as 'the counter-revolution'.60 Techniques of counter-insurgency in forms of surveillance, concentration, torture and propaganda have undoubtedly proved highly transmissible between states and, as Laleh Khalili and Patricia Owens have shown, central to forms of liberal political order.61 To identify counter-revolution and counter-insurgency is, however, to confuse tactic and strategy.

Counter-revolutionaries frequently make use of counter-insurgency. The predominance of anti-colonial revolutions pursued through guerrilla means in the second half of the twentieth century, rather than forms of popular insurrection, encouraged the identification of counterrevolution with the tactics and techniques used against such insurgencies. Yet counter-revolutionaries can also be insurgents. The most famous example, of course, are the Nicaraguan *Contras,* but the counter-revolutionary insurgent has a long history. The very first *guerrilla* was conducted by Spanish peasants fighting *for* the monarchy against the Napoleonic invasion of the early nineteenth century.62 Counter- insurgency and counter-revolution often go together – as have, under certain historical conditions, insurgency and revolution – but they are not identical.

There is a further cognate phenomenon adjacent to counter-revolution but nonetheless distinct. These are 'revolutions from above' or 'passive revolutions'. As we have seen, the most widely accepted definitions of revolution rely on the confluence of these two elements – of the process of a revolutionary uprising leading to revolutionary outcomes – to delineate the concept. Where revolutions from below refer to the 'inspired frenzy of history', revolutions from above reflect more the view of revolutions as Marx's 'locomotive of history', powering forward to the future destination of a different society, and presumably with a driver at the helm. These two aspects of revolution are not always unified. If social revolutions consist of fundamental cultural, economic and institutional transformation, then it may be possible for such transformation – at least

to new forms of class society that do not require the active selfmanagement of the exploited classes – to be carried out by rulers in the absence of mass rebellion.

The revolution from above bears a strong resemblance to Antonio Gramsci's 'passive revolution', a concept that has also been brought to bear on the Egyptian Revolution.63 For Gramsci, passive revolution meant a 'revolution-restoration' allowing 'the bourgeoisie to gain power without dramatic upheavals, without the French machinery of terror [in 1792]'. The previous feudal ruling classes would then find themselves reduced to the status of a 'caste' (i.e. enjoying particular political and cultural privileges but not economic or social control) without the potentially dangerous outburst of revolution from below.64 In the terms outlined earlier, both passive revolution and revolution from above represent the achievement of revolutionary outcomes without the necessity of a revolutionary situation. The classic examples of revolution from above are to be found in Bismarck's unification and industrialisation of Germany, the Meiji restoration in Japan and Nasser's 'Arab socialism' in Egypt.65 Far from being the exception, however, most states have achieved 'political transformations of the state...[that] facilitate the accumulation of capital and the domination of the capitalist class' through revolutions from above.66

This fact distinguishes revolutions from above and passive revolutions from counter-revolutions. The border is not a rigid one: it is a frequent feature of revolutions from above that they are adopted after, and in prophylaxis against, revolutionary outbursts from below, such as that of 1848 in Germany. In the case of Italy, passive revolution signified for Gramsci 'the reaction of the dominant classes to the sporadic and disorganic rebellion of the popular masses with "restorations" that comprehend some parts of the popular demands'.67 The absorption of parts of the revolutionary coalition by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces in Egypt after 2011, for example, suggests a parallel with Gramsci's passive revolution. Yet they differ in this fundamental aspect: passive revolutions and revolutions from above *are* revolutionary projects, in that they transform the state and society over which they rule, usually in order to combat threats from below aspiring to similar transformations, or threats from without (i.e. other states) empowered by already having been transformed. Counter-revolutions seek to prevent or reverse such transformations, as Dan Slater and Nicholas Rush Smith note, even if they never consist solely of a reversion to the past.68 Passive revolutions demobilise or absorb mass movements: counter-revolutions crush them. Once a revolution from below is safely crushed, a revolution from above may be attempted but they remain distinct.

For these reasons, the passive revolution or revolution from above belongs to a particular historical epoch: one in which pre-capitalist ruling classes sought to 'catch-up' with already established capitalist states. This programme, as I argue in the rest of the book, was achieved in the Arab republics by the post-colonial revolutions from above – even if the resulting independent capitalist states were repressive and poor and occupied a subordinate economic and geopolitical position in the global hierarchy. Such revolutions, in other words, can be judged in 'consequentialist' terms. 'Consequentialist'

refers to the view that the European revolutions of the seventeenth to the nineteenth century can be referred to as 'bourgeois' revolutions, not because of the agency of a selfconscious bourgeoisie involved in carrying them out but because of their results in producing independent centres of capital accumulation based on the exploitation of wage labour. This position was articulated against the claim, associated with the historical 'revisionist' and Political Marxist schools, that the European revolutions of the seventeenth to nineteenth century were not accomplished by bourgeois nor were the bourgeoisies of the time capitalist.69

Although I consider the former the stronger argument, my point here is that this particular debate over process versus consequence in revolutions should not be transposed to interpretation of the Arab Spring. All but one of the Arab regimes against which the revolutions erupted in 2011 had their origins in revolutions from above that transformed the agrarian and colonial social structures they inherited in the midtwentieth century. The social consequences of bourgeois revolutions have already been achieved even where their agents were quite different in origin and ideology to the protagonists of the French 1789. Any social revolution issuing against those consequences could, therefore, only come from below, not as a policy from above: as Brecht De Smet and Cemal Burak Tansel note, the revolutionary uprisings did 'not represent an attempt to "catch-up" with the centre's capitalist development but rather embody a practical critique of capital in its "naked" form'.70 In the historical context of the early twenty-first century, the inheritance of nationalist revolutions from above thus provided not a programme for social transformation but a means to bind popular movements to counter-revolutionary ruling classes.

The relevance of this discussion for the understanding of counterrevolution is that counter-revolutionaries seek in some way to end a revolutionary situation in a way favourable either to the *ancien regime* in its narrow political sense or to the social order from which it emerged. Delineating the different forms of revolution – social and political, from above or below – allows us to understand different forms of counterrevolution and of the typical political coalitions and mechanisms that bring them about. How is this done?

Making Counter-Revolution from Above and Below

Revolution places a dilemma before the counter-revolutionaries. For those at the core of the old regime, its hangers-on and beneficiaries, the premise of a revolutionary situation is precisely that the legitimacy of their rule has collapsed – the process to which John Chalcraft refers as 'hegemonic collapse'.71 If, as for Lenin, a revolution consists of a time in which the rulers can no longer rule in the old way and the ruled can no longer be ruled in the old way, counter-revolutionaries must establish a new basis for their old rule. They must build a counter-revolutionary political subject to contend with the revolutionary one. To bring the greatest likelihood of success, they must divide the revolutionaries and attract a part of them – or at least of their potential base of support – to their side. Counter-revolution necessarily involves politics from

above and from below – and from without as counter-revolutionaries seek and find allies beyond their borders.

What do 'above' and 'below' mean here? Revolutions, to recap, occur 'from below' to the degree that they involve mass mobilisation of the population occupying subordinate class and political positions or 'from above' as a policy, albeit a frequently conflictual one, of one section of the ruling elite. Revolutionary situations are thus the product, in part, of rebellions against the existing political order and its coercive apparatus that force the question of rule. Such rebellions represent the moments in which members of a hitherto mute and downtrodden mass assemble in great numbers to decide their own fate. The historical openness of a revolutionary situation consists in this rejection of accustomed subordination, and hence of the accustomed rules of political and social reproduction, by a substantial part of the population in a given state and society.

Revolutionary situations provoked by such revolutions from below frequently, therefore, produce alternative political institutions (communes, soviets, assemblies of the people and so on) and pre-figurative forms of personal and collective experience. Such institutions and experiences were amply present in the Arab revolutions.72 Indeed, their presence links the Arab revolutions with a much longer revolutionary tradition, one that stretches back at least to the *Agreement of the People* presented by the 'agitators' of the New Model Army to the English Parliament in 1649.73 The predominance of limited democratising political revolutions between 1975 and 2010 was accompanied not by a waning of revolution from below in revolutionary situations but by its widening spread. Della Porta again demonstrates that in the Central and Eastern European revolutions of 1989 as much as in the Arab uprisings of 2011, revolutionary situations witnessed a 'euphoria of the streets' that 'promoted [a] conception of democracy [that] was...a social, participatory and deliberative' rather than purely procedural one.74 As discussed later, much of the supererogatory violence of counter-revolution derives from the need to wipe out the psychological and affective, as well as physical, traces of this experience.

The *counter-revolution* from above means both the dismantling of any structural changes achieved by a revolutionary movement and the redoubled repression used to crush such a challenge. The counterrevolution from above is usually mounted by the remaining core of the state, particularly its coercive apparatus, and the political and economic elite clustered around it. This elite reaches down through the middle administrative and military cadres to provide a ready-made glacis of the old order.75 To these may be added not just the rank-and-file officers of the political police and intelligence agencies and their families but the wider penumbra of informants and quasi-operatives – no small number of these in states such as Egypt, Syria and Yemen.

Yet counter-revolution should not be seen merely as the phenomenon simply as a policy at the level of the state carried out by a sociologically defined group. Counter-revolution functions to defend the power of given ruling classes against revolutionary threats from below but, as with revolution, contains a strong affective dimension. Eric Selbin has demonstrated the importance of political narrative to revolutionary move-

ments – the form is no less important to counter-revolutionaries.76 Counter-revolutions are usually, therefore, accompanied by forms of violent suppression that go beyond that apparently necessary to disperse demonstrations, demobilise organisations or defeat poorly armed adversaries: a 'glorious civilisation indeed, the great problem of which is how to get rid of the great heap of corpses it made after the battle was over'.77 Since revolutionary situations open up new forms of political and personal possibility for their participants, effective counter-revolution requires the erasure of that sense of possibility. 'Breaking the people', as Vivien Mathies-Boon and Naomi Head describe in the case of Egypt, is a necessary part of counter-revolution, achieved through brutal and intimate trauma.78 Counter-revolution, to borrow from Mohammed Bamyeh, thus involves two aspects: one concerned with 'gaining power or influence in society' and one that seeks to destroy the 'expectations, hopes, visions' called forth by the revolution.79 The policy of counterrevolution from above means both the dismantling of any structural changes achieved by a revolutionary movement and the redoubled repression used to crush such a challenge.

To succeed, however, counter-revolutions must extend beyond a strategic core to build a political subject of their own. This is the process of making the counter-revolution from below. Counter-revolutions but can be no more considered a single entity than their revolutionary opponents. When revolutionary crises arrive, they inevitably cause a sifting out of political positions and groups that do not necessarily map onto preexisting social classes or even other forms of social division. They rather represent the process of formation of a revolutionary political subject with an identity forged in the revolutionary process itself: the shared experience of clashes with the state or the meaning imbued into slogans such as '*liberté, égalité, fraternité*' or 'bread, freedom, social justice'. However, as much as revolutionary subjects are formed on the basis of pre-existing social relations, so are counter-revolutionary ones. The success or failure of such formation, which usually has its heart some part of the former state apparatus and some fraction of the formerly dominant class aiming at the restoration of the prior order, is vital to the outcome of revolutionary situations.

The composition of specifically counter-revolutionary political subjects is a scantily studied topic. Colin Beck, in identifying pathways from revolutionary situations to revolutionary outcomes, maps the latter based on the predominance of particular actors in the revolutionary coalition.

A predominance of 'civil society' or 'moderate' mobilisers produces, that of 'state actors', 'radical mobilisers', leads to conservative authoritarianism or 'anocracy'(i.e. partial authoritarianism), with the latter also potentially responsible for totalitarianism, a preponderance of either paramilitary mobilisers, state forces of coercion or local officials giving issue to the somewhat residual categories of fragmentation or *caudillismo*.80 John Foran provides a similar topography of revolutionary path- ways but with a more external focus – 'reversed' revolutions resulting from the continuing force of 'dependent development', the fragmentation or degeneration of the oppositional cul-

ture and the closing of the 'world-systemic window' that permitted the revolution in the first place.81

Where these accounts fall short is in their treatment of counterrevolutionaries as either a purely residual force or simply another set of 'mobilisers' in a revolutionary situation. Yet counter-revolutionaries face their own particular problem of mobilisation: how to deal with their 'hegemonic collapse'. Shaken by a revolutionary situation, the old regime cannot pursue a policy of counter-revolution and cannot be successful without adopting certain revolutionary features: an articulated worldview and some degree of mass support. This latter phenomenon is what Mayer refers to as 'the anti-revolution', or what I will refer to as the counter-revolution from below: the popular defence of the institutions of the old order or at least opposition to the new.82 Revolutions and the confrontations they provoke are fought out amongst the populace at large – hence the historical appearance of workers, peasants, the urban poor on both sides of the barricades.83 Where such actors do *not* appear, however, is in the leadership of the counter-revolution. Where the old regime remains intact, or enough of its partisans to assemble and plan a coherent strategy, they pursue as a conscious policy of repression, sabotage or external intrigue.84

The means by which the counter-revolutions from above and below are bound together, and the particular components of this alliance, vary across time and place. Beyond those with a direct stake in the maintenance of the *ancien regime*, usually a far greater proportion of the population than the revolutionaries imagine, the historic bulwarks of support for counter-revolution – including outright opposition to political as well as social equality – tended to come from the countryside and especially landlords or colonial settlers. Since the seminal work of Barrington Moore, landlords – especially landlords employing 'labour-repressive' employing forms of personalistic power and extra-economic coercion over the labourer – have been identified as the strongest opponents of democratic reform, and the staunchest supporters of counter-revolution.85 Such methods of labour control do not presuppose the 'dual freedom' of the labourer: the freedom from the personal dominion of the landlord and the freedom, or rather compulsion, to sell one's labour power for wages. Moore's claim has been challenged, and later modified to one that labour-dependent rather than labour-repressive agriculture is most commonly identified with landlord opposition to democracy.86 In either case, however, landlords who rely on the brute expansion of the labour force and intensification of their labour, rather than technical innovation or capital investment, held a particular affinity with the coercive and undemocratic states that allowed them access to that supply. To the counterrevolutionary landlords may be added the imperial administrations and settler colonists in command of 'rural social hierarchies', who proved the most consistent counter-revolutionaries and against whom most of the anticolonial revolutions of the twentieth century were waged.87

This recognition must be nuanced with an account of the 'uneven and combined' nature of capitalist development, or as Ernst Bloch put it 'the simultaneity of the un-simultaneous'.88 Mayer's argument that twentieth-century counter-revolution was

based on the persistent power of pre-capitalist classes and institutions repeats and generalises the thesis of the so-called special path traversed by Germany from Junker domination to Nazi *Gotterdammerung*.89 Yet as we have seen, the 'special path' was far from special. Rather, the path of revolution from above to achieve capitalist modernity – albeit in different forms of combination with precapitalist classes and relations – has been the general one.

Nonetheless, such classes did form the most consistent and coherent counter-revolutionaries from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, as well as the staff of the administrative and coercive state apparatuses called upon to suppress any general threat to social order. In revolutionary situations, alliance of throne and altar, stiffened by the military bearing of high-ranking officers, were called upon by hitherto liberal or even social-democratic political leaderships to fend off the levelling aspirations – material or juridical – of revolutionaries. In the most well-known historical example of the French Revolution, therefore, counterrevolution was most concentrated in the defence of old agrarian hierarchies and inequalities, even amongst those at the bottom of them: a matter of the resistance to revolutionary attacks on the existing social fabric of village communities, especially the church and the patriarchal family.90 In the prototypical case of the Vendée, large-scale revolts against the French revolutionary regimes of the 1790s were precipitated by peasant resistance to the intrusion of the new state into hitherto relatively autonomous rural communities, most provoked by the revolutionary attacks on the authority of the parish church.91

Even when embedded in wider global and national capitalist frameworks, the world of rural social hierarchy and its concomitant cultures of direct and coercive exploitation come into conflict with ideologies of liberal freedom and hence democratic revolution. This is the case even – or especially – where that freedom is racialised. Manisha Sinha demonstrates how the planter-ideologues of antebellum South Carolina developed a rigorously counter-revolutionary defence of unfree labour that challenged the 'universal ideals of liberty, equality and democracy' in the name of a general 'norm of inequality'.92

The progeny of such social worlds continued to provide the military and administrative apparatus of European states until the Second World War and in some cases after – a permanent bulwark against revolutionary transformation likely to be removed only by force of arms, hence generating recurrent bouts of revolutionary-counter-revolutionary civil war that characterised the continent's history throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.93 In settler and colonised societies, even where the colonists and administrators did not themselves hail from such backgrounds, they exercised analogous forms of personal, paternalistic and direct power over the indigenous populations.

In revolutionary situations leading to democratisation, as Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens demonstrate, the most historically repressive class coalition has been that of agrarian landlords and urban capitalists.94 However, limited, parliamentary democracy has proven more palatable to wage-paying capitalists than 'labour-dependent' landlords because–most of the time–the legal and bodily freedom of the worker is both

a consequence of the 'dual freedom' of workers to sell and to fail to sell their labour power, and allows for a degree of stability negotiated through formal or informal workers' organisations. Coercive power is not absent from this relationship, of course, and in moments of crisis even bourgeoisies that have supported revolutionary movements tend to return to the counter-revolutionary fold when threatened by independent workers' action.95 This alliance has extended even to the reformist leaderships of labour movements: the *Friekorps* militias that crushed the German revolution of 1918–19, thereby preserving the military-aristocratic caste at the heart of the imperial state, did so on the orders of Social Democrat leaders attacking their own rank and file.96 The predominance of old agrarian ruling classes, albeit with urban middle-class allies, in the van of counter-revolution gave a particular character to the revolutionary cycles of the eighteenth to the twentieth century. The threat of equality, juridical or material, between landlord, tenant and peasant brought forth violent opposition from those most frequently in command of violence. As Jack Goldstone notes, social revolutions that promote such forms of levelling and redistribution 'raise more counter-revolutionary pressures'.97 From the response to these threats came codified ideologies of inequality and domination, which had hitherto required no explicit justification. 'Where their predecessors in the old regime thought of inequality as a naturally occurring phenomenon', writes Corey Robin, counter-revolutionaries learn 'that the revolutionaries were right after all: inequality is a human creation' that once unmade can also be remade.98 Hence, the historical interlude between the French and Russian Revolutions witnessed a new phenomenon: mass ideologies and movements of counter-revolution, often racialised and ultra-nationalist in character, that 'raised the popular anti-revolution from below to vitalise and collaborate the counter-revolution from above'.99 These movements typically drew support from rural areas, defending the pre-existing hierarchical social relations even as they were transformed through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They also promulgated a particular vision of the national community, typically in the image of the imagined pre-lapsarian past – an agrarian, devout, religiously and linguistically homogenous community presided over by a stable hierarchy of power. Where, as Eric Selbin has shown, revolutionary narratives offer 'compelling stories' in which the revolutionary subject is the protagonist, the counter-revolutionary one is one of reaction, reversion and defence.100 The hero of the counter-revolutionary narrative is, almost always, the state in its violent and coercive form.

If labour-repressive landlords and colonial administrations are the most consistently anti-democratic and counter-revolutionary force in revolutionary situations, albeit with urban middle-class allies, which social force has played the opposite role? Contrary to the assumptions of much of the democratic transition literature that a rather vaguely defined 'middle class' produces liberal democratic outcomes – an inheritance of the idea of political democracy as the outcome of bourgeois revolutions – large cross-case comparison demonstrates that the most consistent force pushing for democracy has been the organised urban working class.101 Organised workers have both an interest

in general inclusion of the lower social strata to which it belongs and the mobilisational capacity effectively to demand that inclusion.

By contrast, the 'lower middle class', as identified by Arno Mayer, swings between revolutionary and counter-revolutionary positions. The lower (urban) middle class, writes Mayer, is a fundamentally incoherent group that nevertheless 'runs a spectrum from independence to dependence': old-style artisans, shopkeepers, the liberal and technical professions, the private and public sector salariat, middle-managers and low-erlevel service providers of all kinds. The lower middle class is united not by economic interest but more by the psychological experience of precarious but valued status above (in Mayer's reading) manual workers and the unemployed. Especially when threatened by the unstable economic conditions, characteristic of a revolutionary situation, the members of this grouping are apt to swing from revolutionary to counterrevolutionary poles.102

Mayer's characterisation of the lower middle class as inconstant reservoir of counter-revolutionary mobilisation finds obvious echoes, especially in the cases of counter-revolutionary mobilisation in Egypt and Tunisia. The make-up of these strata varies, however, across time and place. As discussed below, the counter-revolutionaries of nine-teenthand twentieth-century Europe (or indeed of the colonial world struggling for liberation) were not those of the early twenty-first century. Likewise, Mayer's outline of the 'anti-revolutionary triad' of reactionaries, conservatives and counter-revolutionaries requires recalibration. Reactionaries (typically concentrated in the landed aristocracy and its associated intellectuals) seek a 'retreat back into a [feudal] world both lost and regretted', whereas conservatives seek the preservation or moderate amelioration of the status quo.103 Counter-revolutionaries, by contrast, revolutionise the content of reaction by adopting the methods of revolution: insurrectionary and extra-systemic, they actively seek a mass base amongst the déclassé and declining economic strata.104 The rise of revolutionary movements, embodied, for Mayer, in increasing workers' organisation and the spread of socialist and communist ideas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries forced these three elements together, giving most initiative to the dynamic counter-revolutionaries.

This forcing together of the anti-revolutionary elements represents another of Abbot's 'regularities...amongst local patterns' in the changing history of revolution.105 The essence of a revolutionary situation is that profound transformation, social or political, goes from being something that couldn't happen to something that very well might. Revolutionary situations tend to produce a polarising dynamic amongst a newly mobilised populace around this possibility – whether to accelerate, halt or reverse the revolutionary process. Hitherto wide and nuanced spectrums of political disagreement tend to coagulate into revolutionary and counter-revolutionary poles, aiding the formation of a counterrevolutionary subject from above and below.

This idea of a dynamic of radicalisation in revolutionary situations lies, of course, at the heart of older ideas of revolution as pathology associated with Crane Brinton – a fever that rises and then dissipates in the body politic.106 For Marx and Engels,

writing of the European revolutions of 1848, this dynamic provides the grounding for the 'revolution in permanence': 1848 would force the revolution beyond the boundaries set even by their most radical bourgeois allies.107

Where Marx and Engels identified the 'permanent revolution' with the pressure exerted by the exploited classes on a timorous German bourgeoisie, a similar force was at work on the counter-revolutionary side: 'counter-revolution is a constantly recurrent condition of existence for the crown after every revolution'. Moreover, this tendency to counterrevolution reflected not just the logic of immediate confrontation – the 'instinct of self-preservation' – with revolutionaries but 'the old feudal bureaucratic society which backs' the monarchical state and, therefore, 'impels it to retract the concessions it has made' and 'maintain its feudal character'.108

Revolutionary situations, in this reading, force a radicalisation of diverse counter-revolutionary as much as revolutionary coalitions. This process is dealt with in particular detail in Marx's history of the *coup d'etat* of Louis Napoleon, which provide the concept of 'Bonapartism' used by De Smet to characterise the Egyptian revolution.109 The centri- petal force of the threat of proletarian revolution brought together previously divided groups of property owners in a composite 'Party of Order': the landholders of the Legitimists and the financiers of the Orleanists, enjoying passive and temporary support from the indebted shopkeepers and small artisans of Paris and other cities for whom 'order' meant a return to solvency.110

Marx and Engels substantial but unsystematic treatment of counterrevolution contributed the following ideas: revolution and counterrevolution are both extra-institutional phenomena; they exert on each other a mutual force of polarisation where revolutionaries become more radical and (bourgeois) counter-revolutionaries become more reactionary, to the extent of allying with classes whose rule they have hitherto opposed; counter-revolutions are, therefore, composed of different and competing fractions of property holders, and even the politically revolutionary form of the republic may be deployed as a counter-revolution against a socially revolutionary form.

As Marc Mulholland has demonstrated, this insight about the attraction of formerly revolutionary liberal bourgeois to (frequently antiliberal, anti-democratic and reactionary) counter-revolution is no mere fantasy of Marx or Marxists but is present in the historical record.111 Nor is this phenomenon restricted to the nineteenth-century history of revolution in Europe. The constitutional revolutions of the turn of the twentieth century – such as the 1908 Ottoman Revolution, the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906 and the Chinese and Mexican Revolutions that began in 1910 – displayed a similar pattern. Led initially by members of the new intelligentsia in alliance with some landlords and (where present) incipient bourgeoisie, they succumbed to renewed counter-revolution as members of the urban poor, peasantry and workers began to press their own social demands.112

In European counter-revolutions, however, counter-revolutionaries typically drew support from rural areas, defending the pre-existing hierarchical social relations even

as they were transformed through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They also promulgated a particular vision of the national community, typically in the image of the imagined pre-lapsarian past – an agrarian, devout, religiously and linguistically homogenous community presided over by a stable hierarchy of power. Where, as Eric Selbin has shown, revolutionary narratives offer 'compelling stories' in which the revolutionary subject is the protagonist, the counter-revolutionary one is one of reaction, reversion and defence.113 The hero of the counter-revolutionary narrative is, almost always, the state in its violent and coercive form. As exposed by the emergence of a revolutionary situation, the continuous, organic and inviolate community whose social arrangements nonetheless require constant vigilance.

Where the European counter-revolutionaries of the eighteenth to twentieth century could draw upon the relatively recent pre-capitalist and agrarian past to build their bases of support, the Arab counterrevolutionaries faced quite a different context in which to solve the same problem. The Arab republics – Bahrain was a different case – facing revolutionary situations in 2011 had to reach back to the period of postcolonial state-led national development. The appeal of the Arab counterrevolution from above to the counter-revolution from below was a tripartite one: of progress as the development of national state capitalism, sovereignty in the independence of the state from its prior colonial overseers and the continuing struggle against Israel, and secularism conceived not as the absence of faith in public life but as a form of regime monopoly – including the sectarian consequences of that monopoly – over public life. This triptych varied from state to state both as historical experience and in the memory of that experience, but it gave an animating structure to the worldview that could hold together 'counter' and 'anti' revolutions. The unity to be defended was the sovereign nation, hard-won in the 1950s and 1960s – a material as much as a symbolic claim, for these were the decades in which subaltern classes were both expanded and incorporated into the state. Sara Salem refers to the anticolonial 'afterlives' of the Nasserist period in Egypt as an example of this incorporation – an insight that I extend to the other Arab republics that experienced revolutionary situations in 2011.114 The threat posed to that unity, embodied in the disorderly events of the revolutions, consisted of a conspiracy aligning the external enemies of the sovereign nation with the internal disorder that disturbed that sovereignty: the tradition of state secularism most often giving concrete form to this conspiracy as the work of Islamists, of whatever stripe.115

Counter-revolutionaries, then, cannot do without some form of mass support if they are to be successful. They must solve the problem of putting back together an old order that has collapsed or is collapsing, and, in doing so, they necessarily radicalise and reset it on a more plebeian basis. The means of uniting the policy of counterrevolution from above, with all the repression and violence it entails, with the support of a counter-revolutionary movement from below, differ across time and place. The reservoir of support amongst 'large agricultural populations' dominated by labour-repressive landlords and an associated prelacy – predominant amongst European counter-revolutionaries – was far less in evidence in the Arab world of the early twenty-first century. The secret

of the Arab counter-revolutions thus lay in the inheritance of a previous set of revolutions: the post-colonial revolutions from above. These revolutions from above were intertwined with the struggle to establish newly independent states, and, therefore, with the question of the international nature of revolution and counter-revolution.

Counter-Revolution from Without:

Revolution, Counter-Revolution and Global Transformation

Counter-revolution has, from its very inception, crossed borders as much as defended them. In part, this derives from the – frequently – universalist aims of revolutionaries. Consider the declaration of Oliver Cromwell's ambassador to Spain during England's revolutionary period of the Commonwealth: 'with the example afforded by London, all kingdoms will annihilate tyranny and become republics'.116 Ayatollah Khomeini, three and a half centuries later, would likewise call upon the 'meek of the world' to 'rise and rescue yourselves from the talons of nefarious oppressors'.117 Little wonder then that Edmund Burke, the English-speaking world's most eloquent counter-revolutionary, invoked a universal crusade against the French regicide regime: all Europe at war 'not with its conduct, but its existence'.118

The premise of Burke's hostility, of course, was the establishment of a successful revolutionary state against which a united front of counterrevolutionary powers might be assembled: a revolutionary outcome rather than a revolutionary situation. This model reflects the experiences of revolutions from the late eighteenth to the late twentieth centuries. The experience of the French and Russian revolutions – still more the anti-colonial revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s against the dying Portuguese Empire or the US satrapy in South Vietnam – prompts us to look for a single axis of confrontation between revolution and counterrevolution. The revolution musters its forces and, whether seen as inspiration or bacillus, compels the hitherto fractious rulers of the *anciens regimes* to unite and extinguish the threat. Revolutions typically create new ideas and apparatuses of statehood, which then reverberate to transform the system of sovereign states.119 Since revolutionaries often reject the legitimacy not only of their own rulers but that of existing principles of rule, 'revolutionary power is morally and psychologically at war with its neighbours all the time'.120 If the claims of the revolution are universal, then so will be the reaction of its enemies.

Revolutions, thus, change sovereignty from being a preserver of stability to an undermining factor, as the revolutionaries pose unpredictable threat both to their neighbours and the international system as a whole. The resulting revolutionary-counter-revolutionary war then permits a calibration of the accurate level of threat, until the revolutionaries are socialised into the existing norms of the international system.121 To be visible in IR, then, counter-revolutions must be directed against revolutions defined by the criteria of successful transition to a new sovereign order.

This view lies behind the accounts of counter-revolution given by scholars in International Relations (IR).122 Contrary to an oft-repeated claim, there is no shortage of scholarship on the topic of revolution emanating from the discipline. The core proposition of this literature holds that both international relations and inter-state competi-

tion are vital to understanding the origins of revolutions, and that revolutions reshape international order.123 In this reshaping, counter-revolutions represent the response of sovereign states to revolutionaries who have already seized power in another sovereign state. Counter-revolutionaries outside the revolutionary state then disregard the very principle of sovereignty they hold threatened by the revolutionary movement: a radicalising and universalising dynamic at work as much outside the state as within it. Nick Bisley provides a useful inventory of the methods used by counter-revolutionary interventionists: direct military action by invasion or other means; support by means of 'arms, training, logistics and finance'; and the blockade and siege of the revolutionaries.124

In their response to revolution, counter-revolutionaries frequently build new sets of alliances or institutions designed to form a *cordon sanitaire* around the revolutionary state. The Concert of Europe, ASEAN and the Gulf Co-operation Council – formed in response to the Iranian revolution – all offer examples of such international architecture built around the necessity of counter-revolution.125 Since revolutions tend to inspire further revolutions elsewhere, forming a revolutionary wave, counter-revolutionaries are concerned to create a bulwark and eventually to turn back the tide. As Kurt Weyland notes, counter-revolutionaries outside of the original site of the revolutionary outbreak have the advantage of time and learning: having witnessed the revolutionary upsurge elsewhere, they are better able to regroup and coordinate their efforts to forestall the spread.126

These considerations function at a largely tactical level, however. International counter-revolution, especially when extended to intervention into revolutionary situations, exposes a deeper 'basic methodological disjuncture' in the discipline separating domestic-social from externalgeopolitical forms of explanation.127 Counter-revolution does not occur only once a 'domestic' social struggle has been transformed into an international one by the seizure of state power. Rather, revolution and counter-revolution are 'inter-societal all the way down'.128 The social relations from which revolutions emerge, and which counter-revolutions preserve, operate at a global level, and the political orders upset by revolution are not merely domestic but also international. Hence, other states – and non-state actors – are always already involved in putatively domestic revolutionary struggles.

This imbrication, like all aspects of revolution, varies in its structure and form according to the historical conjuncture in which it takes place. The revolutions of the eighteenth to the twentieth century were embedded in the unfolding, uneven and combined, development of the interlinked systems of capitalist accumulation and sovereign state competition. This uneven and combined development produced attempts at 'catch-up' by the ruling classes of those polities threatened by states dominated by the new (capitalist) social relations: these attempts produced revolutionary crises due to intra-ruling class conflicts, military defeat or insolvency. The revolutionary victors of the ensuing crisis, even if they face initial external opposition in the long run, succeed to the extent that they remake the state in the image of its competitors.129 The counter-revolutions

directed against the French and Russian revolutions, for example, unfolded in both the social and political registers of revolution. The forces the emigres and *anciens regimes* of Prussia, Russia and the Hapsburgs took on – and, thereby, radicalised – the French revolution were reflected in the restoration of Thermidor: but it was these powers that themselves would have to adapt to the state form established by the French revolution through the revolutions from above of the mid-nineteenth century. The direct foreign intervention to suppress the Russian Revolution and support the Whites in the post-revolutionary civil war was defeated: but under the pressure of military competition with its enemies, the Soviet regime carried out a social counter-revolution of its own through the breakneck industrialisation of the five-year plans.

Central to this understanding, and to the emergence of multiple poles of counter-revolution after 2011, is the idea that the international system is not merely hierarchical but competitive. Both those who celebrate and those who castigate the Arab uprisings as liberal revolutions tend to over-extend the brief post-Cold War predominance of the United States forwards and backwards in time: to speak not of the competitive system of 'imperialism' but of 'Empire' in the singular.130 Yet the Cold War was a competitive system. Where revolutionary anti-colonial movements met with counterinsurgency led by Washington, they were able to call upon support from Moscow or Beijing – provided they did not upset the wider strategic needs of those sponsors. Only in the last two decades of the twentieth century and the first of the twenty-first could limited democratising revolutions – a democracy 'made safe for the world' – find acceptance in an apparently co-operative liberal order, albeit underwritten by American military power.131 As we shall see, this form of democratisation rested upon specific material foundations in the global transformation of agrarian life.

Part of that transformation was carried out by the revolutions from above that established independent Arab republics from the 1950s to the 1970s. These revolutions – Nasser's being the paradigmatic case – belonged to the historical matrix of anti-colonial revolutions of the second half of the twentieth century, directed against the domination of the old colonial powers, the new imperialist domination of the United States and the regional predominance of its ally, Israel. As I note in the individual chapters, genuinely transformative revolutions from above challenged both imperialist domination and the forms of (traditionally counter-revolutionary) landlord power with which it was imbricated.

In this sense, the Arab nationalist revolutions were typical of twentiethcentury revolutions. These were most often directed against two kinds of enemies: landlords and colonial administrations, frequently the same thing. With the partial exception of the Russian revolution, the transformative revolutions of the twentieth century – China, Cuba, Mexico, Algeria and Vietnam – were 'peasant wars': rebellions against agrarian domination and for a wider distribution of land.132 At the heart of these conflicts lay the aspiration to escape the coercive power exercised by large landowners either directly over sharecroppers and tenants, or indirectly through the concentration of

holdings: colonial racial distinctions between, for example, the *colons* and Muslims in French-ruled Algeria, revolving around access to land.

Landlords lost the peasant wars, although it is far from certain that peasants won them. Where anti-colonial nationalist movements took power in their wake, they generally achieved the liquidation of the agrarian *ancien regime*, indigenous or foreign. Rural direct producers were freed from their previous bonds in order to participate in industrialised wage labour, although the degree of such industrialisation varied greatly across countries. Nonetheless, land reform comprised the centrepiece of most strategies of national development in the post-colonial world.133 In the second half of the twentieth century, land reform programmes affected around 1.5 billion people. Whether by revolutionary victory, or reformist adaptation designed to stave off such victory, the world of domination on the land passed largely into history. Land reform was followed, under neoliberal development models, by the global financialisation of landed assets, which made landowner interests more liquid and therefore less threatened by seizure.134 Neither landlords nor the rural poor disappeared but rather the relationships that led to violent social transformation attempted by the latter and resisted by the former no longer prevailed even in the Global South: these were struggles over land, to be sure, but lacking the 'systemic...significance' of the classic agrarian question, which meant the dispossession of 'classes of predatory pre-capitalist landed property'.135

By the turn of the twentieth century, the most familiar counterrevolutionary actors, hereditary or semi-hereditary landlords employing extra-economic coercion, had largely disappeared. The Arab revolutions from above were responsible for this outcome in the region. The 'agrarian question' – of what to do about both the peasantry and 'predatory landed property' – had been solved, or at least displaced by other issues of inequality of land, lack of investment in rural areas and so on.136 This shift had enormous consequences for revolution and counter-revolution. The classic sites of Skocpol's social revolutions, semi-peripheral agrarian empires, ceased to exist: in 1961, the world population was two-thirds rural and one-third urban: by the beginning of the twenty-first century, the proportions were equal, with the crossover point reached and surpassed decades before in many countries.137 According to Marc Beissinger's historical database of revolutionary episodes, 61 per cent of revolutions were primarily 'rural' in their locus: after 1979, they were 61 per cent urban.138

This urbanisation was accompanied in many, though not all states, by increased proletarianisation, providing the social basis for the liberal democratising revolutions of the late twentieth century. Before 1975, the presence of 'labour-dependent landowners' is strongly correlated with undemocratic regimes and with the collapse or overthrow of democracies. After 1975, this correlation disappears or reverses into a weakly positive effect on democratisation. This change offers a concrete example of the shrinking horizons of social mobilisation: landlords were willing to support, as a fall-back measure, democracies that would guarantee stability and property rather than threaten those interests and which they sought to shape to provide such guarantees.139 The new life-worlds of urban migrants – closely interconnected with each other, with far higher

degrees of literacy and concentrated near sites of governmental power – promoted the 'urban civic' repertoire of protest associated with the democratising revolutions.140 An even stronger source of popular power lay in the growth of working classes and their organisational muscle, as trade unions and other working-class organisations followed the same path as their European forebears in demanding democratic rights, as well as wage increases.141 Of course, by no means all the cases of democratic revolution studied featured organised labour as their moving force, but the component 'waves' of democratisation from the earlier 1970s to the turn of the century clustered around core cases that did.142

These changes underpinned the 'liberal revolutions' of the late twentieth century. As George Lawson notes, since these revolutions produced 'weak states' promoting 'political and symbolic' rather than social and economic transformation, they were received not with counterrevolutionary hostility but with welcoming acceptance by the dominant states in the international system, most of all in the United States.143 The victory of the latter over its Soviet competitor reflected in part this transformation. The Arab world appeared a lone hold-out to the liberal democratic wave, a recalcitrance used as the justification for the doctrine of regime by change by force adopted by the US Bush administration. For this reason, the 2011 uprisings were initially assimilated either to the understanding of regime change under continuing US dominance of the region or to the model of liberal democratising revolution – rather than to fall to competing authoritarian counter-revolution.

Understanding the role of that international counter-revolution here requires reconstructing the pre-2011 historical context. As noted earlier, revolution and counter-revolution have always crossed the boundary between domestic and international politics. Revolutionary situations have frequently – certainly until the latter twentieth century – emerged from crises spurred on by war or international competition. Revolutionaries both draw upon and pursue globally inspired programmes of emancipation, at least until the threat of counterrevolutionary powers forces them to remould their aspirations and build more centralised states and competitive economies. In this sense, international competition and counter-revolution impelled the transformation of agrarian absolutisms and empires – France, Russia, and China – into stronger and more centralised nation-states.144

The post-colonial revolutions from above in Tunisia, Syria, Egypt, and in more quixotic form Libya and Yemen, reprised some of this history. Seeking to build states independent both of the former colonial or mandate powers and of the dominion of the United States, the postcolonial Arab nationalist revolutions – almost always led by junior officers – initially adopted the methods of state-led development. In the process, they succeeded, for the most part, in expropriating or at least subordinating the historically counter-revolutionary forces of landlords and (where present) settler colonists. The establishment of Israel, a latecoming settler colony, in the region and its support by first Britain and France and then the United States, perpetuated the dynamic of anticolonial conflict after it had faded elsewhere – in which the devastating

Arab defeat of 1967 formed a turning point. By the late 1960s, a reciprocal radicalisation, in states such as Syria, was taking place linking the struggle for Palestinian national liberation with demands for the overthrow of existing pro-Western regimes (e.g. in Jordan and Lebanon) or more radical social transformation where these had already been overthrown.

This process of radicalisation could only be pushed to its fullest extent or turned back. The leaders of what were now state bourgeoisies in the Arab republics took the latter course, with more or less severity and speed. Anwar Sadat's *infitah* in Egypt presaged a greater role for the private sector and a turn towards the United States: the equivalent 'corrective movement' in Syria under Hafez al-Assad proceeded more slowly and brooked no change of geopolitical alignment but marked a similar retreat from the radicalism of the mid-1960s. The spread of such policies throughout the Arab republics, accompanied at most by cosmetic efforts at political pluralism, was accompanied by ever-increasing US influence over the region up until the invasion of Iraq in 2003. In this sense, developments in the Arab republics matched those at a global level as industrial production shifted towards the Pacific and some other areas of the Global South (but not the Middle East), while neoliberal policies of privatisation and financialisation became the predominant development model.

Within this system at the apogee of US domination and proclaimed liberal world order – roughly between 1979 and 2010 – the contours of competitive international counter-revolution were being shaped. By the early 2000s, the Arab regimes had become, in Lisa Wedeen's terms, forms of 'neoliberal autocracy' combining continued coercive power with

'desires for market freedom, upward mobility and consumer pleasure'.145 Urbanising but only rarely industrialising under the neoliberal model, they attracted millions of migrants to cities wherein they could secure only precarious access to wage labour at best. Their ruling core was no longer composed either of the revolutionary military officers, typically of lower middle-class origin, who had pursued the post-colonial revolution from above, but of new composite financial-security elites. These new ruling classes were connected to global markets, not disconnected from them – in many cases directly incorporating Gulf capital. These, rather than the agrarian-bourgeois-middle-class coalitions of nineteenth-century Europe, would form the core of the counterrevolutionary project.

These global transformations in political economy underpinned the period of liberal democratising revolutions and US predominance that began, not coincidentally, around 1975. At the apogee of this moment, around the turn of the millennium and the US invasion of Iraq, US domination of the region under the banner of 'regime change' appeared near complete: a hierarchical relationship to which even notionally antiimperialist states such as Syria and Libya had to adapt, further deepening the programmes of neoliberal reform. Yet beneath this umbrella of US domination, fissures were emerging. The occupation of Iraq eroded rather than strengthened the US position in the region, enabling a greater role for Iran in both its neighbour and the wider

Middle East. Meanwhile, as a consequence of their linkage to global markets through oil rent, a class of Gulf capital' came to interpenetrate all of the ruling classes of the Arab states.146 When the uprisings began in 2011, these developments would provide for a competitive rather than singular form of counter-revolution and one that was not solely dependent on the United States.

This historical context points to the importance of understanding the *competitive* nature of international counter-revolution. Particularly in cases where a revolutionary situation has yet to be resolved in favour of a revolutionary outcome, the field lies open for external opponents of such an outcome to intervene not only to forestall the revolution but to frustrate the plans of other states. The classic cases of the 'great revolutions' in France, Russia or China tended to generate more internally unified counter-revolutionary fronts, but this was not the case, for example, in the constitutional revolutions of 1905–1911.147 Contrary to the understanding of US imperialism as a form of 'Empire' or uni-polar predominance, the perspective adopted in this book sees imperialism as a system of competing, plural but hierarchically organised states – in which regional powers enjoy a wide latitude of action.

Conclusion

Understanding counter-revolution implies a different way of understanding revolution. Instead of focusing solely on revolutionary outcomes – of which counter-revolution itself is one – understanding counterrevolution requires paying attention to revolutionary situations and the potentials contained within them. Although counter-revolution may emerge from the ranks of the revolutionaries, undoing the social content of a revolution while retaining its outward form, the more relevant type of counter-revolution in the post-2011 Middle East was that which puts an end to revolutionary situations in favour of a recomposed and recharged version of the old order.

To achieve such a project, and carry out a policy of repression of revolutionaries, counter-revolutionaries cannot merely rely on force 'from above'. Indeed, the premise of a revolutionary situation is that such a command can no longer be issued in the certainty of its being obeyed. Rather, counter-revolutionaries must look to allies beyond the ruling elite and the core of the state – to build a counter-revolutionary subject 'from below'. To do so, just like revolutionaries, they must rely on more than just material interest, instead crafting a narrative of the nation embattled by a conspiracy embodied in the revolution as well as an appeal to some pre-lapsarian past. Such narratives frequently, although not always, also mobilise forms of ascriptive difference, such as sect, to cement the counter-revolutionary coalition.

Counter-revolutionaries are also compelled to look beyond their borders to find allies to pursue a counter-revolution from without. Given that revolutions upset international as well as domestic political orders, such allies are usually forthcoming. To the degree that counterrevolutionaries are unable to attract sufficient support 'from below', they may seek it from without. Yet this aspect of counter-revolution, as for the phenomenon as a whole, underwent a transformation in the late twentieth century. Where the United States and older imperial powers had played the role of counter-revolutionaries in the

face of anti-colonial and socialist revolutionaries in the early part of the twentieth century, in its last quarter they appeared transformed into the welcoming sponsors of liberal, democratising waves of political revolution. This transition was underpinned by a global shift, as the hitherto most reliably counterrevolutionary groups of labour-dependent landlords or colonial settlers were defeated or incorporated into financialised global networks, and the most democratic social force, the organised urban working class, spread across the Global South, albeit under largely non-revolutionary leadership. It was this historically unusual habitable zone that produced the liberal democratising revolutions in whose path the Arab uprisings were expected to follow. We now turn to the substantive analysis of how these uprisings and counter-revolutions actually unfolded – beginning with the revolutionary situations.

3. The Revolutionary Situations

To speak of counter-revolution implies the existence of a revolution to counter. As we have seen, the critique of the *thawraat* of 2011 has been precisely that these were 'revolutions that weren't'.1 The reasoning behind this claim reflected two contrasting models of revolution, by comparison with each of which the Arab revolutions were held to fall short: the classic model of Skocpol's successful social revolutions driving profound political, economic and cultural change and the far more limited conception of the democratising, liberal or 'negotiated' revolutions believed overdue in a region still dominated by authoritarian regimes.2 These critiques sit within distinct political and theoretical coordinates – the Skocpolian critique within a definition of revolution by its results, a feature more easily found in the revolutions from above pursued by the radical Arab republican regimes of the mid-twentieth century – and the transition critique within the post-Cold War worldview of US unipolarity that followed the collapse of such regimes elsewhere in the world.

In either case, the Arab revolutions proved a disappointment. They issued in no long-lasting social transformations or new state forms, unless the relatively brief experiments of the ISIS Caliphate and Kurdish 'democratic confederalism' are included in that rubric. Only in Tunisia was the traditional test of democratic transition, two peaceful handovers of power at the ballot box, met. In most of the cases, with the partial exception of Libya, the revolutionaries did not end up in power. Surely then, these events were not revolutions at all but at best uprisings and at worst conspiracies?

As I have sought to demonstrate in the previous chapters, this claim begs the question of revolutionary failure, and therefore of counterrevolutionary success. Assuming the outcome it seeks to explain, it offers no explanation at all of how revolutionary situations do or do not issue in revolutionary outcomes (or which such outcomes they produce) and, therefore, erases from analytical consideration the fact of counter-revolution. In the later chapters of this book, I outline what the Arab counter-revolutions were and give some account of the differing reasons for their success. Here, I take up a different task: to demonstrate that the uprisings that took place in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Bahrain, Yemen and Libya in 2011constituted revolutionary situations. Emerging from mass uprisings from below, of unprecedented scale in these revolutionary situations consisted, in Mona el-Ghobashy's characterisation of the Egyptian case, not of 'a purposive project by a revolutionary class but...a conjuncture of acute political struggle over state powers'.3 They represented turning points, in the sense discussed in Chapter 2: moments in which the 'inertial quality' of hitherto stable political and social structures and alternatives come to seem both comprehensible and possible.4

To borrow another phrase from the Egyptian context, Walter Armbrust characterises revolutions as moments of 'antistructure'– an 'un-closeable breach in everyday socio-political practice'.5 The degree and extent of the revolutionary situation varied across Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Bahrain, Libya and Yemen, but each was marked off from their non-revolutionary neighbours by the experience of such a conjunctural breach. These were the situations that counterrevolutionaries sought to end, a project that necessitated disorienting, dividing and repressing the mass uprisings that brought them about.

The revolutionary subjects forged in the uprisings united forces of varying class, regional, sectarian, generational and communal backgrounds. They were nonetheless rooted in dissatisfaction with the *infitah* or neoliberal economic model of the preceding decades. In no case could these be reduced simply to the outburst of middle-class youth yearning for Western consumption patterns and liberal freedoms – although such yearnings were certainly present, albeit mixed in with others. Each revolutionary situation, thus, witnessed parallel social as well as political struggles.

The fractured sovereignty characteristic of a revolutionary situation may emerge vertically – where elements of the existing state apparatus right up to the apex split off to form competing institutions – or horizontally, where alternative forms of rule and legitimacy emerge from an insurgent population. These are not mutually exclusive processes: a horizontal alternative, typically featuring practices of pre-figurative politics at odds with the old regime, may be incorporated into the existing state as a form of democratic electoral legitimacy and therefore limited by it.6 Crucial to this process is that expansion of the self through collective action, discussed in Chapter 2, that is central to imagining such alternatives. The revolutionary situations provoked by the Arab uprisings featured both of these forms. This aspect the Arab uprisings share with

(some of) the democratising liberal revolutions of the late twentieth century: they were quite different, however, in their deployment of violence. The Arab revolutions were not non-violent, although neither were they pre-planned guerrilla insurrections (such organisations emerging only after the initial uprisings). Such violence as they did deploy was mass-based and strategic, targeting the coercive and political nodes of the regimes, and allowing for larger mobilisations to grow elsewhere: in this regard the 'violent' uprisings in Libya and Syria did not differ from their counterparts in Egypt or Tunisia.

The revolutionary situations, thus, set the parameters for the respective counter-revolutions that put an end to them. In order for counterrevolutionaries to re-establish order – or rather, establish it for none of the post-2011 regimes was the same as what came before – the revolutionary subjects had to be disrupted, repressed and confronted with their counter-revolutionary equivalent. Supererogatory violence would have to be deployed, and not only by the formal forces of the state, to undo the revolutionary experience of collective liberation. The breach in everyday socio-political life that (most) revolutionaries experienced as a moment of liberation was also experienced by those opposed to or ambiguous about the revolutions as painful and extended uncertainty,

a wound in time that cried out to be closed. The different means by which this was achieved, and the dilemmas that they posed, established the different trajectories taken by the counter-revolutions. Before tracing those different trajectories, however, we must first tell the story of the revolutionary situations to which they put an end.

Tunisia

We may begin, as the revolutions did, in Tunisia. The initial spark for the Tunisian revolution is well-known, the self-immolation of a young street vendor, Mohammed Bouazizi, on the 17th of December 2010 in the provincial town of Sidi Bouzid. Protests spread swiftly throughout the impoverished region, and the police proved unable to cope once these became generalised across the country, including a national lawyers' strike. The main organising network spreading these protests belonged to the activists of the *Union General de Travailleurs Tunisiennes*, the UGTT. The union leadership historically close to the ruling party, the *Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique* (RCD), and having been forced to support and participate in the protests following the shooting of demonstrators in early January, the UGTT spearheaded the demonstrations and eventually called a general strike. Following the killings and increased protests of the 8th and 9th of January, the Tunisian police experienced a 'full breakdown' on the 10th of that month, and with some policemen even joining the protests.7 The UGTT called a successful general strike on the 11th and 12th of January, precipitating the flight of the dictator Ben Ali to Saudi Arabia. By his own account, Ben Ali intended to return and crush the revolt. The Tunisian plane crew took off and left him behind. Following constitutional procedure, Fouad Mezba'a became president, taking over from the interim Muhammad Ghannushi, who then became PM, and appointed a mixed cabinet including feminists and youth activists but also RCD officials.

The appointment of this cabinet prompted the return of revolutionaries to the streets. The revolution, therefore, continued with protests at the Casbah, opposite the executive building, demanding their resignation and a new cabinet. It was the repression of that demonstration on the 25th of February that led to the resignation of Ghannushi and the appointment of El-Cebsi, who dissolved, at least at the top, the RCD; one protestor said, 'We almost won... It is eighty per cent of a victory'.8 El-Cebsi called the 'High Commission for the Realization of the Objectives of the Revolution, of Political Reform and of Democratic Transition' to steer the process towards the Constituent Assembly elections scheduled for July 2011 and then postponed to the following October. In the October 2011 elections, Ennahda dominated the Islamist field, the hard-edged Salafists of *Hizb-al-Tahrir* having been debarred for their open antipathy to democratic principles. Ghannushi's party offered an extensive programme promising – with the details left vague – to halve unemployment and channelling the sense that the transformation promised by the revolution had not yet been achieved.9 When the elections did take place, registration efforts proved only partially successful, with half the eligible voters registered. Ninety per cent of those turned out, however. To the surprise of none, Ennahda won a plurality, some 41.4 per cent of the vote and therefore 89 assembly seats; the CPR 13.8 per cent and 29 seats; Ettakatol under 10

per cent, and 20 seats; a weak performance by Nejib Chebbi's PDP of under 8 per cent and 16 seats.10 Therefore, CPR and Ettakatol formed a coalition with Ennahda, under the latter's choice of PM, Hammadi Jebali (Moncef Marzouki of the CPR as president and Jaafar of Ettakatol as assembly leader) when the CA opened in late December 2011 and the bulk of the ministries taken by Ennahda. From this point on, the Tunisian revolution entered a different phase, one mediated by the operation of the Constituent Assembly and pitting the forces of the UGTT and their allies in the disparate revolutionary coalition, the holdovers of the old regime, and the Islamists of Ennahda against one another in a triangular struggle.

How are we to determine the mass, revolutionary character of the Tunisian insurrection of December 2010 to February 2011? The degree of (self-reported) participation in and support for the insurrection exceeds historical norms for revolutionary movements. With all due caveats on sample size and representativeness, a fifth of Tunisians in 2013 reported having participated in the revolution itself, strongly skewed towards young, male urban dwellers: 45.7 per cent of urban 18to 30-year-old men reported participating in the revolution as opposed to only 4 per cent of rural women over sixty.11 The emerging Tunisian revolutionary subject united, as most revolutions have done, participants from a variety of class positions and backgrounds. Those describing themselves as 'comfortably' or 'adequately' well-off were likelier to have participated in the uprising than the 'struggling' or 'inadequately'-off – although this still would leave a majority of the revolutionaries in the latter categories, given their preponderance in the population as a whole.12 Subjective perception of one's own financial circumstances does not always correspond to class positions however: more pertinent is how the Tunisian revolution was formed. Its core comprised precariously, semior unemployed youth on one side and the organised labour force of the UGTT on the other. The Tunisian revolution was marked off from its counterparts by the almost equal participation of both the formally employed and organised workforce, and those suffering most from the unavailability or incapacity of the wage relation to meet their basic needs.

The UGTT having been swung to support the uprising by the pressure of its lower ranks against the leadership, the union federation generalised and spread what had been a revolt of the dispossessed in the periphery into a nationwide movement: the 'most important factor in the ultimate success of the movement was political and logistical support from UGTT local branches and sectoral unions'.13 Unique amongst the Arab uprisings, demonstrations departed from union offices, not mosques. When Bouazizi lay dying, it was worker militants – from the UGTT teachers' section – who took him to hospital.14 Ben Ali was forced to flee in the end because of the general strike of the 12th and 13th of January. No less important, although less institutionalised, were the mobilisations of unemployed youth and graduates. The unemployment rate for the general labour force in 2010, it should be recalled, reached a discouraging 15 per cent, increasing to a dismal 40 per cent for those under 25, with half of these being degree holders – precisely the cohort likeliest to have participated in the upris-

ing.15 The pressure of the UGTT rank-and-file put the federation placing at the head of a movement nonetheless dominated by, in the words of trade unionist Adneene Haji, 'the famished and marginalised without political ties'.16

A class-based uprising, the bulk of its participants coming from the youthful and peripheralised poor but cohering around the force of organised labour, thus clashed with the Tunisian state in early 2011. The state came off the worse. Contrary to their depiction as pacific 'Jasmine Revolutionaries', Tunisians proved well aware of the need for direct and violent confrontation with the state security apparatus. In the first two weeks of January 2011, protestors burned police stations and RCD offices, the fists and nerve centres of Ben Ali's repressive body politic. In the words of Ghassen, an unemployed graduate, '[k]ids from working class neighbourhoods' in Tunis in the second week of January 'started to burn down police stations and that is when, for the first time, I felt like something extraordinary was happening in the country'.17

This strategic use of violence underpinned the success of the revolution in two ways. First, the deadly repression mounted by the state forced the hand of the UGTT leadership, and that of other organisations, to take a stand in support of the uprising.18 Second, the nightly clashes eroded the ability of the police to continue their repressive function and thereby allowed the non-violent demonstrations to grow even larger, eventually reaching the point where the police force collapsed. The uprising – mobilising perhaps one in five of the population, based largely in the poorer areas, spread by the activists of the country's trade union federation and engaged in violent confrontation with the state – had revealed the Tunisian security forces to be far less numerous and cohesive than their reputation held: exhausted, they crumpled in the face of the revolutionary wave.19

Measured by fatalities by per capita, the Tunisian revolution was more, not less, deadly than the Egyptian 'Eighteen Days'– albeit over a slightly longer period of roughly a month. Three hundred people died in the revolt to overthrow Ben Ali. In Egypt, a country with a population nine times greater than that of Tunisia, fewer than 900 people were killed during the Eighteen Days. Siege tactics were employed by the Tunisian army, for example, against Sidi Bouzid. In the words of Hafedh, a UGTT official in the town, 'Sidi Bouzid was surrounded by the cops and then the army joined them' – a recollection shared by Mohammed, a secondary school teacher, who describes how '[t]he regime changed its strategy on January 6 or 7. After that point we had a new participant in the clashes – the army'. For nearly two weeks, according to Foued, another teacher in Sidi Bouzid, 'there were battles in the night with the police and peaceful protests during the day'. These battles were organised autonomously by the youth of Sidi Bouzid's largely poor neighbourhoods.20

A mythology of the Tunisian armed forces' wholehearted support for the demonstrations has grown up, largely based on the alleged refusal of army commander Rachid Ammar to implement Ben Ali's order to fire upon demonstrators in January 2011: held to embody the apolitical professionalism that distinguishes the Tunisian armed forces from their colleagues elsewhere in the region. Yet no such refusal ever occurred

because, according to interviews with army officers of the time, no such order was ever given.21 The rumour of Rachid's refusal to fire seems to have originated with blogger (later MP) Yassine Ayari, seeking to encourage members of the armed forces to defect.22 Indeed, Ammar was given, and accepted, command of the operations room of the interior ministry by the fleeing Ben Ali on the 14th of January 2011.23 By this point, security forces – the *Brigades d'Ordre Publique*, or riot police, rather than the army – had already opened lethal fire on protestors in several locales, including killing 23 on one day in Kasserine. The Tunisian police force, outnumbered by the protestors and defending a regime in which they held little material stake, certainly did collapse, with some policemen even joining the demonstrations. Yet it was not until ten days after the departure of Ben Ali that Ammar benefited from the opportunity to declare that 'the army will protect the revolution'..24

Having thus confronted the state, the uprising established, for a time, something like the alternative institutions of a revolutionary democracy in their sit-ins at the Casbah in central Tunis. The first began scarcely a week after the departure of Ben Ali, to demand a fuller cleansing of the old regime from cabinet and state positions: dispersed by the riot police after five days but not before forcing the appointment of new cabinet ministers. All 24 regional governors were replaced, as well as 34 senior officers of the security services and police. The second Casbah occupation, taking place the following month, is justly seen as a turning point in the Tunisian revolution. The Casbah occupation, and the Tunisian revolution as a whole, proved fecund ground for the sense of expansion of the self through collective action characteristic of revolutionary situations. Holding the square for twelve days, including at times hundreds of thousands of protestors, one participant described it as 'an extraordinary movement of solidarity and self-management throughout which we experienced the complete absence of authority'.25 In the words of one Tunisian interview cited, told Donatella Della Porta:

Tunisians had been barred from protesting. They discovered this with surprise right after the revolution...as a result of acting out freedoms that were inaccessible for more than fifty years there were social movements and protests and Avenue Bourguiba and other places. 26

Amongst the consequential aspects of this collective expansion of horizons was the unsettling of gender norms – already, as we have seen, a subject of contention in the Bourguibist heritage of national developmentalism. Like all revolutionary situations, as Andrea Khalil writes, the Tunisian uprising 'momentarily suspend[ed] and subvert[ed] binary structures of masculine/feminine, public/private etc that constituted the hierarchies of dictatorship'. Even if surveys reveal greater levels of male (and youthful) participation in the revolution, 'by all accounts, the participation of women in the crowds of the Tunisian revolution occurred on a basis of gender equality'. Although much of this participation related also to women's traditional gender roles as mothers of revolutionaries killed by the security services, women's participation in the uprising

reflected an understanding of gender equality as part of a wider collective struggle for the rights and dignity of all citizens.27

Questions of gender equality would come to form one of the lines of division between Islamist and developmental modernist visions of postBen Ali Tunisa, limiting the revolutionary process to its political aspects. This limitation began, in the eyes of many revolutionaries, with the end of the Casbah occupation.28 The occupation ended with the concession – by no means universally demanded by the protestors – of the priority of elections to the Constituent Assembly. Tunisia's transition to a limited liberal democracy was dependent upon absorbing, and deflecting, the alternative revolutionary form established in confrontation with the state.

Egypt

The Tunisian revolution, by any measure, constituted a revolutionary situation established by a mass class-based uprising from below. What of Egypt? Was the '25th of January Revolution' simply a case of Egypt's middle class marching to Tahrir Square?29 For all their ties of timing and inspiration, the two revolutions also differed significantly: in many ways, the Tunisian was the deeper of the two. Nonetheless, to wipe the Egyptian 25th of January Revolution from the catalogue of revolutionary history would mean taking with it a great many other instances that fall short of the level of mass uprising, class-mobilisation and conflict with the state witnessed in Cairo and beyond. Its core consisted of concerted, violent, collective action against the security apparatus and the ruling party, particularly by the youth of poor neighbourhoods.

The Egyptian uprising, inspired by the Tunisian example, began on the 25th of January 2011 – the date of a historic clash between Egyptian police and British forces in Ismailia in 1952, later commemorated as 'Police Day' in the later stages of Hosni Mubarak's rule. The date of the uprising was no coincidence: grievances against the police, high-handed, brutal and corrupt, motivated many protestors. Tens of thousands gathered in Cairo and other cities, occupying the capital's Tahrir Square. Dispersed overnight by the police, the regime's attempted repression – mass arrests and closure of the internet service for the entire country – served only to inflame the protestors. Reassembling in defiance of curfews, arrests and communications blackout, the protestors mustered for the 'Friday of Anger', the 28th of January. The demonstrations on this day proved decisive in pushing back the police and breaking the ability to control the streets – a retreat combined with the emptying of prisons by the Ministry of Interior. The armed forces permitted Mubarak an attempt to regain the initiative in the 'Battle of the Camel': the dispatch of hundreds of horseand camel-borne *baltageya* or 'thugs' into the crowds of protestors in Tahrir Square on the 2nd of February.

The protestors, their numbers increasingly swelled by members of the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafist currents that had initially remained aloof from the uprising, repulsed this attack. Unable to quell the movement without significant escalation – and unsure of the loyalty of the troops if he did – Mubarak standing amongst the military high command and their patrons in Washington began to slip. A wave of strikes engulfed even the installations of military production, where industrial action was

punishable as desertion. Having clung to power in his address of the 10th of February, Mubarak found himself surrounded by a march of 'hundreds of thousands' proceeding from Tahrir to the presidential palace. The president was removed from office by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, gathering the 25 most senior officers in the Egyptian military – Mubarak's defenestration tersely announced by his vicepresident, Omar Suleiman.

The Egyptian revolution did not end with the topping of Hosni Mubarak. The contest between revolution and counter-revolution continued until at least July 2013, when the coup against Muslim Brotherhood President Mohammed Morsi installed a new counterrevolutionary regime. The nature of that counter-revolution requires further reflection below – but what was the nature of the revolutionary subject against which it was directed?

Estimates of the number of participants in the Egyptian revolution, as in the other Arab revolutions, are necessarily hazy. Extrapolation from the *Arab Barometer* – which, it must be noted, includes only a relatively small sample of respondents reporting participation in the revolution – suggests around 8 per cent of the Egyptian population participated in the uprising: this (possibly conservative) estimate would equate to five to six million people.30 Compilation of participants' narratives and media reports leads to a much higher estimate, of 15–20 million, which would account for a fifth to a quarter of the Egyptian population at the time.31

Since these forms of data are vulnerable to double-counting, it is also plausible that the numbers were lower than this – in the early stages of the revolution, argues Neil Ketchley, considerably lower, in the hundreds of thousands rather than the millions.32 The Arab Transformations survey, however, carried out in November 2014, more than a year after the coup against Morsi and following the confirmation of in power Abdelfattah elSisi, reported a participation rate of 6.9 per cent, or roughly 5.6 million people. A further 21.9 per cent reported giving passive support to the uprising, which a majority of the respondents (60.2 per cent) described as a 'revolution'.33

The Egyptian revolution consisted then of a mass, if not majority, uprising drawing upon the support of somewhat under a third of the population, arousing the hostility of a similar proportion and leaving the remainder somewhere between these poles. Was this mass movement a 'middle-class' one? Beissinger, Amaney and Jamal depict the participants in the Egyptian revolution as 'middle class' on the basis of the identification of the majority of them with the occupational category of *muwazzaf*, employee (typically in public sector clerical work) rather than '*amil*,

'worker'.34 Such a usage of the concept of class also poses dangers, because of its ascriptive rather than relational character. For decades, 'workers and peasants' seats in the Egyptian parliament, for example, were held by industrialists and landlords even if their background or the sector in which they made their money corresponded to the idea of manual or agrarian (rather than intellectual or urban) labour: class should be seen as an evolving relationship that generates capacities for and interests in certain kinds of collective action. A *muwazzaf* in a civil service office was just as unlikely to

enjoy adequate wages or autonomy in their work as a permanently employed manual worker in a factory – the transformation of Egyptian economic policy in the 1990s and 2000s and the consequent end of the social contract of the Nasser years, bringing groups such as teachers, nurses and civil servants into the orbit of the working class from which they had once cherished a distance.35

This does not mean that the Egyptian revolution represented the ideal type of a proletarian uprising. Rather the uprising relied on a coalition of the barely satisfied inhabitants of Egypt's cities: young (and not so young) graduates facing a life of insecure penury; workers striking back against the consequences of years of neoliberal policies; and a part of the urban poor, oppressed by the police as much as by the squalor of life in a post-developmental state. On the measure of self-identification of income, the middle two categories of 'struggling' or 'inadequate' were likeliest both to support and to have participated in the 25th of January Revolution. Thirty-three per cent of those who considered their income inadequate and 29.6 per cent of those who considered it adequate supported the revolution, and 11.9 per cent of the latter and 7 per cent of the former reported participating in it. It should be recalled that in a country where the 'struggling' and inadequately re-numerated represent two-thirds of the population, even at lower proportional levels of participation, most of the protestors would have come from those groups. Both support for and participation in the revolution was concentrated in urban areas. Forty-six per cent of Egyptians in metropolitan areas and 30.5 per cent of Egyptians in urban Lower Egypt (north of Cairo) supported the revolution, and 17.6 per cent and 9.2 per cent of them respectively participated in it. For rural lower Egypt, the equivalent figures were

26.9 per cent and 6.5 per cent; urban upper Egypt (south of Cairo and Beni Suef) 25.5 per cent and 6.5 per cent; for rural Upper Egypt 16.1 per cent and 1.6 per cent.36

To identify oneself as 'struggling', or receiving a merely 'adequate' income is, of course, a purely passive measure. More important for identifying the role of class coalitions in the revolutionary moment are the forms of organisation, demands and contestation that revolutionaries adopt. Here, even in the passive form of answers to opinion surveys, economic demands assume a greater salience. 55.7 per cent of protestors identified 'economic problems' as their main reason for protesting – which nonetheless did not exclude other reasons. Fifty-six and half per cent of those with adequate incomes, 60.7 per cent of those with comfortable ones, 60.4 per cent of those with inadequate and 48.3 per cent of the struggling reported economic reasons as the main source of their protest.37 Class-based *activity,* moreover, played a central role both in preparing the ground for the 18 days and in the final push to topple Mubarak.

Although numerically large, Egypt's formally employed and organised working class is still a minority compared to those precariously employed in the informal sector. Despite half a century of state control of trade unions, more than 1.7 million workers took part in more than 1,900 strikes and other protests (in the absence of free unions) between 2004 and 2008.38 This strike wave prefigured the revolution of 2011. A new independent organisation emerged: the Egyptian Independent Trade Union Federation

(EITUF), which was to play a significant role both before and after the fall of Mubarak. It was massive demonstrations that (at least temporarily) broke the power of the police apparatus, rather than strikes, although workers were present on them. It was the final days of Mubarak's reign, the 10th and 11th of February, that saw a huge increase in strike activity. A general strike called on Wednesday, the 9th of February, spread quickly even to the military production facilities: at this point, the core ruling apparatus decided to dispense with Mubarak and declare the rule of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. The level of labour actions actually increased after this. There were 1,400 recorded collective labour actions in 2011, 1,969 in 2012 and 2,400 in the first quarter of 2013.39

The strikes of 2011–13 represented the most widespread and intense wave of industrial action in Egypt's history. Yet they remained – after the 11th of February at least – largely uncoordinated at the national level, as workers launched local actions for better pay and conditions or against the privatisation of their enterprises, apparently inspired by demonstrations nearby or in Tahrir itself. Immediately prior to the departure of Mubarak labour, protests had come to be the most common form of protest, but not the largest by number of participants: unsurprising in itself, since one striker at the point of production exercises a far greater impact than one demonstrator on the street or square.40

To this direct workers' participation must be added a second element: the outsize role of the urban poor, especially in the most confrontational points of the 18 days. The destruction of police stations was likelier in urban areas with lower average levels of education.41 Records of the deaths – overwhelmingly male – of the protestors tend not to record data from which we can make a class analysis of the protests. The geography and timing of the deaths nonetheless offer some instructive trends: by far the largest single death toll in one day – 664, or 62 per cent of the entire death toll of the 18 Days – took place on the 28th of January, 'the Friday of Anger', in which protestors confronted and overwhelmed the police and security forces. Protests, and deaths, were concentrated mainly in Cairo and Alexandria: the majority, 51 per cent, in the former once the sections of Greater Cairo included in the governorates of Giza and Qalyoubia are included.42

Outside the two main cities of Cairo and Alexandria, there was a clearer pattern of protest. The main sites were the towns of Mansoura, Mahalla el-Kubra, and Suez and far less in rural upper Egypt. The confrontations with the police in Suez were particularly fierce.43 It would be a fallacy to assume everyone in such towns shares a class position, but this geographical pattern is not suggestive of a 'middle class' character to the revolution. The town of Mahalla el-Kubra is the long-standing centre of industrial militancy in the workers' movement in Egypt. The strike wave that began in the region in 2006 was seen, and indeed adopted by the organisers of the initial protests on the 25th of January as a precursor to the uprising.

As in the case of Tunisia, then, the actual experience of the Egyptian revolution was not non-violent. The main mode of force mustered by the revolutionaries was the

physical destruction of the infrastructure of the regime – National Democratic Party offices, especially the headquarters visible from Tahrir Square – and police stations. At least 84 district police stations (a quarter of the national total) were burned down – possibly 150 or nearly half of the police stations in the country. Half of the district police stations in Cairo and 60 per cent in Alexandria were destroyed on the 'Friday of Anger'. Four thousand police vehicles met the same fate. Around 300 people were killed while attacking police stations – three times the total number of casualties in the squares. Moreover, this violence did not hamper but rather permitted the expansion of the revolutionary coalition to reach the breadth necessary to topple Mubarak's regime. The forces of the Ministry of Interior, the chief coercive instrument of the regime in maintaining itself against any form of popular opposition, were broken on the 'Friday of Anger'. Overstretched and taken by surprise, they were overwhelmed by two groups of initial participants in the uprising: activists with existing political networks, and the urban youth of poorer areas attacking the police stations.44 The 18 days, especially away from the epicentre of Tahrir Square, resembled a war of vengeance waged by these youth against the police, including actual battles in the areas of Fatimid Cairo and Bulaq al-Dakur.45

These confrontations permitted the expansion of the protest movement to the millions who took the streets in the first week of February, who otherwise would have been swiftly dispersed by the Ministry of Interior. Egypt's revolution, against which the counter-revolution was then mounted, thus, consisted of a mass uprising of at least several million people – albeit commanding a likely minority of support amongst the broader populace – based on parts of the workers' movement, the youthful urban poor, and a large section of those experiencing 'inadequate' or merely 'adequate' conditions of life.

As in Tunisia, these revolutionaries mounted not just a stumbling process of democratic transition but a nationwide – if uneven – revolt against perceived injustice, hierarchy and oppression of all kinds. The years 2011–2013 were distinguished from the era of Mubarak that preceded and that of Sisi that succeeded it by a retreat of the regime and the achievement, in practice of revolutionary demands, that permitted the imagination of more fundamental transformation: that expansion of the self through collective action that is characteristic of revolutionary situations. Revolutionaries degraded the security apparatus, won the effective exercise rights of democratic assembly and political and economic organisation, and 'cleansed' public institutions of their old regime managers.46 Workers refused the authorities of their bosses, women rejected the domination of men, and Coptic Christians defied both statesponsored sectarianism and the acquiescence of their clergy with it.47

The gendered hierarchy of power, by no means limited either to the regime or its Islamist opposition, was also unsettled by this generalised spirit of revolt. Women were far from absent from previous traditions of revolt in Egypt, of course. To take but one example, working-class women were at the forefront of the strike wave of the mid-2000s in the Nile Delta.48 As in Tunisia, however, the advancement of gender equality had

been associated with the regime as a pet cause of the first lady, Suzanne Mubarak. This co-option exacerbated the sense in which the 'the discourse and vocabulary of feminism' appeared 'alien in terms of class and culture' to the constituencies of workers' and Islamist movements.49 This division would re-appear after January 2011 as a means of counter-revolution: in particular, the spread of street violence against women (*taharrush*, 'harassment'), which predated the uprising but served further to demobilise the revolutionaries. Nonetheless, in the occupation of Tahrir, many women not only participated at the forefront of the uprising but considered the square a 'utopian' and 'perfect' place in which they did not have to assert the demand for gender equality because they felt as if it had already been achieved.50

Such experiences reflected the general transformation of both the collective and individual outlooks of all those who participated in the revolution, infusing them with a new sense of 'connection, solidarity and equality'.51 The revolution was not simply an outcome but a practice. The 'republic of Tahrir', as many of its participants referred to the occupied square in central Cairo, in this view should be seen not as a series of demands whose success or failure, victory or defeat can be judged after the fact but rather a laboratory of a different kind of social relations.52 Into this breach in the social and political order emerged a 'communal fellowship, where everything seemed possible'.53 Not only did a 'significant portion of the population'54 acquiesce in a challenge to the control of the state; they also mounted it themselves. From the 25th of January 2011, a heterogeneous popular subject – *al-sha'b*, 'the people' – contested first the sovereignty of Hosni Mubarak's regime and then that of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces that replaced it.55

In the spring of 2011, this moment of revolutionary possibility was visible in the streets of downtown central Cairo itself. The saturation of every corner with young conscripts of the internal security forces was gone, replaced by older professional policemen paying indifferent attention to traffic duties. At the entry to Tahrir Square from Tala'at Harb street, citizens attached their handwritten hopes and petitions to the pavement, upon which passers-by carefully avoided treading. In the square itself, a tree was similarly decorated with handwritten visions of a new Egypt, while a variable throng of citizens engaged in constant open-air debate about the future of the revolution. Posters of Mubarak or the National Democratic Party were replaced with those of revolutionary martyrs or dedicated to the new parties and demands that had emerged. 'Mubarak' metro station was renamed 'Martyrs'.56

Ahmed Shokr gives a sense of the expanded, collective self that infused the Egyptian revolutionary situation with its epicentre on Tahrir where;

Crossing the popular checkpoints, one was greeted, like a hero, by a chorale of young men chanting, 'Welcome revolutionaries!' It was shocking enough to see no cars or police, and more so to merge into a roaring, colorful sea of Egyptians. 'The People Demand the Removal of the Regime,' read one of the largest banners, hoisted above the grassy island in the center of the square. And indeed, the dwellers of Tahrir had proudly declared themselves to be a people. Everyone had a place: rebels young and old, profes-

sionals, factory workers, friends, families, performers, lovers, street vendors. Resources were the sole property of no one; a spirit of mutual aid prevailed. Canteens offered free food to anybody in need, makeshift clinics provided first aid to the wounded and volunteers stepped up to ensure communal comfort and security distributing woollen blankets on cold nights and organizing guards at the entrances. Evenings gave way to music and poetry, which people from all walks of life were free to enjoy.57

Liberating for the revolutionaries, this breach in the social order, with all the enticing or frightening possibilities it called forth, proved intolerable to others. The *hizb al-kanaba*, or 'party of the couch', who neither experienced nor supported this liminal moment of possibility, would prove a mainstay of the counter-revolution that put an end to it. Yet not only these but also some in the revolutionary coalition would be won over to form part of the Egyptian counter-revolutionary subject formed in 2011–13: a story that is told in the subsequent chapter.

Syria

In Syria, as in Libya, the uprising of 2011 faced a regime that maintained a claim to 'revolutionary' legitimacy. Many on the Arab and global Left saw in the Syrian uprising of 2011 a continuity with the regime change efforts of the Bush administration in the previous decade. Yet the Syrian uprising did not differ in its fundamentals from those in Egypt and Tunisia that inspired it. The Syrian insurrection of 2011 represented an indigenous, popular uprising that contested the sovereignty of central state with its own institutions.

Survey and events data are more difficult to establish in Syria than in Tunisia or Egypt, censorship, on the one hand, and an effusion of revolutionary media, on the other. Supporters of the revolution are likely to give higher numbers of participants at protests: opponents to minimise them or deny their occurrence altogether. Such work as has been done with Syrian refugees, of course, reflects the population likeliest to flee, usually from the more restive opposition areas. Surveys of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, where regime supporters (or the revolution's opponents) were far more likely to be found, demonstrate a fairly consistent pattern with other forms of evidence – thereby strengthening the conclusions drawn. Fifty-three per cent of Syrian refugees in Lebanon surveyed in 2015 supported one or other faction of the opposition (defined as 'nationalist', 'domestic Islamist' and 'foreign Islamist'), while 40 per cent supported, or at least identified more with, the regime and its allies.58 This snapshot of Syrian refugee public opinion, taken long after the battle lines of civil war had hardened, tallies with some of what we know of the initial uprising.

The very first protests, in Damascus in February and March 2011, were comparatively small in size but large in effect as they broke the taboo on public speech against the regime.59 The turning point occurred in late March 2011 in the border town of Dera'a: several adolescents had been tortured to death after writing anti-Assad slogans on the wall of their school. The insulting response of the local Ba'ath party governor – Bashar al-Assad's cousin – brought 'tens of thousands' of Dera'awis to the streets on the 19th of March, followed by 'massive protests' a week later.60 The regime forces be-

sieged the mosque in which the protestors had gathered, leading to sympathy protests across the country: in the suburbs of Damascus and in provincial centres such as Hama, Homs, Deir Ezzor, Zabadani, Idlib, Salamiyah and Baniyas.61 In Deir Ezzor, 'tens of thousands' gathered to topple the statue of Hafez al-Assad.62 On the 18th of April, yet more 'tens of thousands' of protestors attempted to occupy the central square in Homs.63

A common pattern, once demonstrators had established their relative safety was for protests to occur on a daily, or even twice-daily, basis: these continued through the early summer of 2011, culminating in the 'largest demonstrations in Syrian history' in Hama, assembling on the 7th of July some half a million people in a city of 700,000 inhabitants.64 The protests of the spring and summer 2011 continued at an increasing pace and scale until they were 'spread throughout all major population centres of the country as well as throughout rural areas'.65 Where they were able to, Syrians continued to assemble in great numbers, not just to protest against the Assad regime but to celebrate their liberation from it: as for example, in the largely Kurdish city of Qamishli throughout 2012.66

The revolutionary moment again prompted a 'collective effervescence' through action and a breach in the old social order: an experience rendered particularly acute by the harshness of decades of Ba'athist rule and the national repressed memory of the *ahdath* ('events') of Hama thirty years before.67 One interlocutor of the novelist Samar Yazbeck described the transformation of Hama by the revolutionary uprising in terms repeated in many other accounts:

I saw with my own eyes a man speaking into the microphone among the hordes of demonstrators: *I'm an Alawite and I'm against the regime, sectarianism isn't the issue, the regime wants to drum up sectarian strife.* The people would repeat in unison: *One, One, One, the Syrian People are One!* The people in Hama were organized. To me, life there seemed beautiful and awesome, with no security forces and no police. The people were the traffic police, they were the ones who cleaned up the squares and the streets when the demonstrations of half a million men [sic] was over. The people were cleaning up the square as if it was their own home.68

Where the Syrian uprising shared the expansive collective self of the other revolutions, it was distinguished by its geography. The Syrian revolution displayed the inverse of the Egyptian pattern – which radiated to and from the centre of Cairo albeit with pockets of strength in Alexandria, the lower Delta and Suez – and a frustrated version of the Tunisian – which began in the marginalised interior but spread to the capital through the medium of the UGTT union federation.69 The Syrian revolution entered half of Aleppo under arms and never penetrated beyond the urban periphery of Damascus: the regime was careful to protect its economic and political nerve centres. The protestors tore down statues of the Assads, father and son and burned Ba'ath party offices and the commercial installations of businessmen associated with the regime, such as those belonging to Rami Makhlouf.70 In this, they resembled, rather than differed

from, their Tunisian and Egyptian counterparts. What was the nature, then, of this Syrian revolutionary subject?

This question is difficult to answer in the same way as Tunisia, Egypt or Bahrain, because of the total absence of independent workers' organisations before 2011 in Syria. In 2009, the manufacturing industry accounted for 6.9 per cent of GDP and 15 per cent of the labour force: public sector manufacturing enterprises, which tended to be larger, employed 75,000 people, whereas the far more dispersed and smaller facilities of the private sector employed 452,000.71 This comparatively small core of industrial workers possessed no independent or semiindependent organisations like the UGTT in Tunisia or the Bahraini General Federation of Trade Unions, still less rebellious new formations on the Egyptian model. The Syrian trade union federation acted as an arm of the regime and a transmission belt for its patronage.72

Revolutionaries did attempt to make use of the strike weapon – but these tended to be commercial strikes, of small shop owners, taxi drivers and so on rather than offices and factories. In some cases, such as in Manbij in 2012, a successful general strike drove out the regime forces and replaced them with a 'revolutionary council'.73 The attempted nationwide 'Dignity Strike' of autumn 2012 was far less successful. About 600 strikes occurred across the country, concentrated in Deir Ezzor and Homs, but the effort was less successful in the crucial centres of Damascus and Aleppo. Nonetheless, 187 factories were closed and 85,000 workers sacked in the subsequent two months.74

If nationwide industrial action never took off, the class basis of the Syrian uprising can still be inferred from other indicators. In the 1990s and 2000s, the passive compact between the peasantry and the Ba'ath was broken in favour of an alliance with a cross-confessional economic elite.75 The breaking of this compact gave rise, according to Samer Abboud, to 'five distinct social groupings' that took part in the uprising: the 'secular, educated middle class' and the 'unemployed, marginalised and urban subalterns'; 'political Islamists' and 'political activists' and kinship groups 'who could mobilize members based on existing socioeconomic grievances and historical exclusion from Ba'ath party power'.76 The mainstay of the revolution was the third group, the 'slipper-wearing' young men of impoverished rural and peri-urban districts.77 Yassin al-Haj Saleh characterises the Syrian revolutionary subject, at least initially, as composed of 'local and civic networks rebelling against various forms of deprivation with modern, educated and cultured women and men who are motivated by aspirations of freedom, individuality and autonomy - values associated with an educated middle class emancipated from local frameworks'..78

The notion of the *thawra 'ahliyya* was frequently invoked to describe the prominence of such frameworks in the revolution.79 Although translated as 'civil revolution', the adjective '*ahliyya* – with its root in people or kin, '*ahl* – implies a sense of communal identification rather than abstraction. *Harb 'ahilyya* is 'civil war': the connection between the two is not that of conflict but rather of rootedness in a local social fabric. The predominance of the *thawra 'ahliyya,* in part, reflected the method of pre-2011 Ba'ath governance where the regime, eschewing the model of national 'popular organisations'

of the 1960s and 1970s, preserved and exacerbated existing sectarian, geographical and kinship divisions in Syrian society in order to maintain its role as the sole guarantor of order.80

The Syrian revolution emerged from the interaction of this policy with the economic geography created by Bashar's neoliberal turn. The result was the concentration of wealth and power in the main cities (and amongst a cross-sectarian and cosmopolitan elite), while (predominantly but not solely Sunni) villages and provinces that had once formed the bedrock of Ba'ath rule were left behind. Cities such as Dera'a had once been Ba'ath bastions. Rastan, which produced many Free Syrian Army (FSA) men, was once the favoured recruiting ground for the officer corps of the national army.81 Idlib, still outside of regime control and dominated by hard-line Sunni Islamists ten years after the uprising, was once known for producing disproportionate numbers of police recruits.82 Yet these areas were to become the heartlands of first the revolution and then the armed opposition.

Not every poor town or village joined the uprising, however – certainly not amongst the still hard-scrabble Alawite villages of the coastal mountains – nor was every centre of the uprising poor. Zabadani, for example, was considered before 2011 a rather pleasant and well-heeled resort town.83 Divisions in provincial Syrian towns between the *balad*, or old town, and the *mahatta* (literally 'station' in which government and security employees were concentrated) mapped uneasily onto sect and class in determining attitudes to the uprising.84 The property boom in Damascus and Aleppo in the early period of Bashar al-Assad's reign, like its counterparts in London or New York, enriched (often Sunni) asset owners in formerly outlying suburbs, who nonetheless remained culturally distant from the self-consciously cosmopolitan elite in the centres of these cities. The expansion of state and security services under Hafez al-Assad produced new suburbs and development in areas in which the personnel staffing these institutions – often, although not exclusively of Alawi background – were housed. These were often built on lands expropriated or bought cheaply from the older (usually Sunni) families of the *balad.* The revolution in many areas, thus, turned on a conflict between such neighbourhoods or settlements, as in that between Mou'adamiyya and Sumariyya in the outskirts of Damascus.85

Nonetheless, demonstrations were almost always concentrated in informal and working-class neighbourhoods, in part because these were less heavily penetrated by the security apparatus: the rebel half of Aleppo 'mapped almost exactly that of blue collar working-class Sunni neighbourhoods'.86 These districts had themselves been swollen with large numbers of recent migrants from the surrounding countryside, often impoverished by the dual effects of drought and neoliberal economic policy.87 The Syrian uprising 'was sparked in rural areas or in the outskirts of cities that are inhabited by rural people' with the '[a]ffluent parts of the cities' playing 'no major role'. As in Libya, tribal affiliation offered a means to mobilisation in Syria but also one that often pitted younger, revolutionary tribespeople against pro-regime sheikhs.88 Surveys of Syrian refugees found that, although regime supporters were

rarely wealthy, the typical opposition supporter was three times more likely to have lived in overcrowded conditions before 2011 and half as likely to have completed secondary school.89

The reaction of the Syrian regime to the protests also quickly posed the question of sovereignty and coercive power. Deadly shots were already fired on the first protests in Dera'a: as they grew, it became clear the revolutionaries would have to challenge the state, not merely petition it, if they were to continue protesting.90 Already in the summer of 2011, revolutionaries in cities such as Deir Ezzor were discussing the need for 'self-organisation following the expulsion of the state apparatus'.91 Such alternative institutions emerged, however, in much more organic fashion. Never fully coalescing into a single national authority, the uprising nonetheless produced three types of alternative organisations to the state: the local co-ordinating committees (LCCs), the local councils and the 'Free Syrian Army' (FSA).

The LCCs organised the local protests, attempting to link them up as much as possible. Their initial aim was not to replace the Assad regime but rather to co-ordinate and expand a protest movement against it. Beginning with activists arrested in the first demonstrations in Damascus, they had grown to number 400 committees by 2014.92 The local 'revolutionary councils' were distinct from the LCCs, although in practice the former often 'morphed' into the latter.93 Their mandate was to maintain local services and provide aid in the areas from which the regime had retreated: they, therefore, acquired the responsibilities of administrative power but without the tax base to support it. The blueprint for the local councils was provided by Omar Aziz, an anarchist and economist who was to die incarcerated by the regime in Adra prison in 2013. Aziz proposed in the autumn of 2011 the formation of local councils to 'support the people in managing their own lives independent of institutions and state agencies' and 'to initiate activities of the social revolution': overcoming, Aziz thought, the distinction between the time of revolutionary upsurge and that of quotidian life.94

The first such council was founded in Zabadani, to the north of Damascus, at the beginning of 2012: composed of nine members nominated by the revolutionary activists and then voted on by the citizenry. By no means all of the councils relied upon such methods, some simply reflecting the political will of locally powerful clans or militias: in rebel

Aleppo the alternative judiciary and police force was based on the *shar'ia*compliant 'Unified Arab Code'.95 From 2013 onwards, elections for these bodies were held in exile in Turkey: then in the summer of 2013, elections were held in the rebellious areas of Aleppo, in Raqqa in January 2014, and in the Damascus suburbs in the spring of 2014.96 Lacking funds of their own, the councils over time became conduits of external aid administered, a development much regretted by their original founders. In the more conservative areas of the *thawra 'ahliyya*, women were often excluded from positions of leadership in the councils.97 This was despite – as in the other uprisings – their extensive participation both in the demonstrations and in the institutions of civic governance and aid that they threw up. Many of these female leaders (such as

Razan Zeitouneh and Samira Khalil, both of whom would be kidnapped by the 'Jaysh al-Islam' militia in 2013) belonged to established urban opposition circles but far from all – for example, the founders of local women's resource centres in towns such as Kafranbel and Eastern Ghouta suburbs of Damascus.98

Whatever their flaws, the revolutionary local councils represented an alternative to the central sovereignty of Damascus, based on the principle of popular legitimacy: a genuinely revolutionary development. In regional towns such as Manbij, Taftanaz or Saraqeb, local revolutionaries established a longer-lasting version of the self-governance and political experimentation found in the protest occupations of Tahrir Square or the Casbah in Tunis. They ran schools and clinics, established newspapers and libraries: even, in some areas, re-instated the price controls on basic goods removed under Bashar.99 These 'mini-republics' were established by mass revolts from below that precipitated the withdrawal of the old regime: they represented a revolutionary alternative, if not an entirely coherent one, to the existing Syrian state.100

The emergence of local revolutionary councils marked the fracture in the civilian apparatus of the Syrian state caused by the mass uprising. More widely known are the defections that the uprising provoked in the ranks of the Syrian armed forces: combining with local volunteers to form the 'Free Syrian Army' or FSA. Despite numerous attempts, the FSA never formed a unified professional body with a single command. The term refers rather to an assemblage of largely local militias organised into *kata'ib* (battalions) and *liwa'* (brigades). Arms first began to appear on demonstrations in the summer of 2011, four or five months into the uprising and after the deadly assaults and sweeps on towns such as Dera'a and Homs: the exception being Baniyas, a city with a deep history of sectarian division discussed later. The first FSA groups used light weapons to defend demonstrators from regime fire.101 Syria's conscript army increasingly shed its lower ranks, deserting and defecting, often out of revulsion at orders to fire on demonstrators.102 Armed men in Jisr alShughour – including Islamists – killed 120 regime personnel in June

2011, following the use of live fire against a funeral procession.103 The foundation of a 'Free Syrian Army' was announced by Colonel Riad alAssaad on the 19th of July 2011.

Brigades were established with no central strategic plan, often being set up by whichever of the most active, and well-financed, local protest leaders agreed with principle of arming the revolution. Most relied upon some mixture of defection from the – conscript – Syrian Arab Army combined with local recruitment. The FSA itself claimed in 2014 that 61 per cent of the 2011 strength of the SAA, or about 189,000 men, were wanted for desertion.104 Such a claim about the strength of an adversary must be treated with extreme caution. Nonetheless, SAA units were reported by deserters in 2012 to be shedding a third of their manpower from the lower ranks – rather than the wholesale defection of units with their officers – with 10,000 men operating under the FSA banner in the Homs countryside alone.105 Homs proved a particular area of strength, where the 'Farouk brigade' commanded by Abdel Razzaq

Tlass – army lieutenant and nephew of Manaf Tlass, the republican guard brigadier general who would himself become the highest-ranking military defector – replicating the command structures and some of the authoritarian practices of the SAA.106 As the revolution became increasingly militarised, female activists often found themselves reduced to support roles sustaining shattered and besieged communities – but even in areas dominated by ISIS or other armed Islamist groups, such activism did not entirely disappear.107

Syria in 2011–12 experienced a mass, class-based uprising from below that fractured the state into competing military and civilian institutions. The latter were primarily composed of self-governing councils in the areas abandoned by regime forces, which tended to be the poorer provincial towns and the working-class districts of larger cities such as Aleppo. That this revolutionary uprising led to a bloody and divisive conflict, pitching substantial sections of Syrian society against one another and inviting an extremely high degree of outside intervention, renders the Syrian case more, rather than less, similar to classical revolutionary experiences.

Bahrain

Bahrain witnessed neither an attempted transition to liberal democracy (such as seen in Tunisia and Egypt) nor the collapse into civil war that characterised the Syrian, Libyan and Yemeni cases. Nonetheless, a mass uprising in the kingdom did render the Khalifa monarchy unable to govern, a state of affairs implicitly recognised by their reliance on military intervention by the Gulf Co-operation Council. That the eventual repression was carried out by the Bahraini security forces should not obscure the depth of the crisis reached by mid-March 2011: competing and incompatible claims to control of the state, especially after the radicalisation of the movement to demand a republic, the active commitment to these aims of very substantial part of the population and the inability of the regime to crush this contender on its own. It was in this sense that Bahrain, as much as the republics, witnessed a revolutionary situation of 'anti-structure', in which revolutionaries experienced a new form of collective self-hood.

As in the other Arab revolutions, the Pearl Roundabout in Manama became a location in which existing gender hierarchies (as prevalent amongst the main opposition party *Al-Wefaq* as the monarchical regime) were both challenged and reiterated. According to activist and academic Ala'a al-Shehabi, in conversation with Frances Hasso,

You could see that a new public sphere was forming, with its own power...There were definitely women at the committee level, at the medical tent, the media tent, they were everywhere. They were very organized. When you start off on the same footing on a blank page there is no space for previous social boundaries to be enforced...As the revolution continued, you got a sense of the tension women's activism produced, with statements from al Wefaq such as "I urge our good women to please retreat [from] confrontations." You don't go telling [the activist] Zainab al Khawaja to retreat. She goes looking for a confrontation!108

Women's participation in the uprising was central not just to the reproduction of the Pearl Roundabout as an inhabitable occupation but in direct and daring confrontation

with the police and security forces. Such actions drew not only the response of the regime but attempt at patriarchal restraint from leading oppositionists and (Shi'a) religious figures, which were largely ignored by the female revolutionaries. Nonetheless, as is explored in more detail in Chapter 5, what Frances Hasso calls 'the sect-sex-police nexus' was to prove crucial to the Bahraini counterrevolution.109

This challenge to gender norms is to be expected, given the extent of the Bahraini uprising. On some accounts, one in five Bahrain citizens participated in the uprising that began on the 14th of February 2011.110 The initial protests on that day, according to the (generally conservative) Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), gathered some 6,000 demonstrators at the Pearl Roundabout, Manama lacking the public space of a Tahrir Square or Casbah to occupy.111 In a citizen population the size of Bahrain's, this was still a large figure – equivalent to about 80,000 in Egypt, for example. The size of the protests increased throughout February 2011. The general strike called by the GFBTU for the 20th of February was reportedly observed by between 60 per cent and 85 per cent of the citizen workforce, across the sectarian divide between Sunni and Shi'a.112 The occupation of the Pearl Roundabout on the 22nd of February attracted, again according to the conservative BICI estimate 100,000–150,000: even at the lower bound, this would indeed represent one in six of the Bahraini citizen population.113 On most days of the month between the 17th of February and the entry of the Peninsula Shield force on the 15th of March, demonstrators numbering in the thousands, often above 10,000, gathered at the Pearl Roundabout.114 These figures refer to the citizen minority of the population, not the majority of Bahrain's expatriate inhabitants. Indeed, opposing the extension of Bahraini nationality to Sunni expatriates (*tajnis*) formed one of the main demands of the protest movement.

After offering an initial financial incentive to the protestors to stay away (the King distributed 1,000 dinars to each Bahraini family on the 12th of February), the monarchy turned to repression, dispersing the occupation of the Pearl Roundabout on the 17th. Funerals for protestors killed by the police themselves became larger protests, which converged on the roundabout. The General Federation of Bahraini Trade Unions (GF-BTU) called a general strike for the 17th of February: the following day, the King agreed to allow protestors to return. Intended to placate the movement, this decision instead led to its expansion – especially into schools, hospitals and universities and the Shi'a villages surrounding Manama. By early March, the protestors were calling for a republic rather than the reform of the constitutional monarchy and had begun marching towards the financial district and Rifa, the wealthy area of Manama occupied by Bahrain's Sunni and Khalifa elite. Incapable of clearing the roads of protestors themselves, the Khalifa was forced on the 15th of March to call upon the 'Peninsula Shield force' of GCC troops – predominantly Saudis and Emiratis – to provide rear support freeing up the Bahrain Defence Force and police to disperse the protests and mount a ferocious campaign of arrests, torture, sackings and expulsion against the participants in the uprising.

Given Bahrain's reliance on non-citizen labour, to what extent can this be described as a class-based uprising? The question is intertwined not only with the hierarchy of native, foreign (and Western) labour but also the political sectarianism practised by the Khalifa regime and discussed in further detail in Chapter 5. The existence of the independent GFBTU, organising Bahraini citizens, allows a clearer index of working-class involvement. The GFBTU and unofficial strikes played a central role in the uprising: the general strike of the 20th of February attracting a staggering proportion of the workforce, as noted earlier. Education, and in particular secondary schools, became a battleground of the struggle between the regime and its popular opponents. Thousands of school students went on strike in February and March. Teachers, whose trade union the Bahraini Teachers' Society was one of the most supportive of the uprising, joined them from the 3rd of March. An estimated 80 per cent of schools participated in the strike.115 Clashes inside schools pitched students – and their protesting parents – against headteachers and pro-regime parents.116 The Bahraini Arab Petroleum Company (BAPCO) refinery reported absenteeism of 60 per cent on the 16th and 17th of March, reducing production to around one eight of its normal level.117

A measure of workers' participation in the Bahraini uprising may be seen in the steps taken to repress it. The BICI report 'received 1,624 complaints' of suspension or dismissal from work between February and June 2011.118 The Bahrain Center for Human Rights, an NGO, reports a much higher number of dismissals: 2,000 public sector and 2,500 private-sector employees.119 The largest single number of dismissals – 228 – took place at Aluminium Bahrain (ALBA).120 Public sector dismissals were concentrated in the Ministry of Education: an unsurprising development, given the prominence of the teachers' union, the Bahrain Teachers' Society and of their students in the protests. A further concentration of disciplinary action, both suspension and dismissal, was found in the Ministry of Health. Here the Salmaniya Medical Complex next to the Pearl Roundabout formed a particular target. In the repression following the entry of the Peninsula Shield Force, the Bahrain Teachers' Society was dissolved and its deputy president Jalila alSalman arrested – sharing a cell with Rula al-Safar, the president of the Bahrain Nurses' Society – and 48 medical personnel were charged with attempting to overthrow the regime.121 Those arrested, suspended or dismissed included personnel at the Ministry of Interior, and at least one serving police officer.122

The sackings, reflecting as they did the levels of participation in the uprising, were not limited to teachers or nurses. The revolt was just as deep in Bahrain's industrial facilities, such as they were. As noted earlier, the highest levels of sackings took place at the ALBA aluminium plant: 14 per cent of the workforce were dismissed. Sixty-four workers also reported dismissal at the Arab Shipbuilding and Repair Yard company, wherein the local trade union 'alleged that all nine of its board members were dismissed for inciting other employees to strike' and that employees were sacked based on their presumed sectarian affiliation. Similar complaints were made at the telecoms company BATELCO and Gulf Air, the national airline.123 As in Egypt and Tunisia, however, the youth of Bahrain's poorer locales – unemployed or precariously employed and

usually Shi'a – also played a central role in the uprising. In the mainly Shi'a villages-cum-suburbs around Manama, confrontations with the police were especially fierce, with the tactics of the security forces resembling military sieges and raids rather than domestic policing.124

Bahrain witnessed neither the fall of an incumbent leader nor the splintering of the state into competing authorities. In part, this was an effect of the small size of the state and the rapidity with which its neighbours reacted with counter-revolutionary force. Like the other movements of 2011, Bahraini revolutionaries, nonetheless, briefly established a counter-society of their own with its centre in the occupation of the Pearl Roundabout. Following the example of the Casbah and Tahrir, Bahraini protestors turned the Pearl Roundabout into a pre-figuration of the society in which they wished to live. As in these other spaces, Bahraini revolutionaries developed insurgent forms of the democracy they had been denied by the rule of the Khalifas.125 The demands raised in these forums became more radical over time, especially as the police responded to the protests with lethal force.

The Khalifas' security forces did attempt to clear the occupation of the Pearl Roundabout but proved unable to quell the revolt on their own. Their first attempt on the 17th of February involved around 1,000 police, Bahraini Defence Force troops and members of *mukhabarat* agencies using tear gas, rubber bullets and shotgun rounds to disperse the protestors and killing three.126 A smaller group of protestors, refusing to be cowed, returned to the roundabout the next day where they met with BDF roadblocks and live fire: one man, Rida Mohammed Hassan, was shot. It was this open confrontation that led the regime concentrated around King Hamad, his uncle and Prime Minister Prince Khalifa, and son and Deputy Prime Minister Crown Prince Salman, to re-open the roundabout to protestors. The Khalifas were then in a bind, unable to move back or forward on their own account. By the middle of March, checkpoints and neighbourhood 'popular committees' were established amidst rumours of unidentified 'armed gangs'.127 The police were unable to re-open the main highway linking the peninsula to Saudi Arabia. In the words of an eye-witness, police were being forced to retreat in pitched battles with the protestors, the former realising 'that they did not have the numbers'.128 The authority of the Khalifas then was so compromised by the uprising as to require its bolstering at the hands of the outside powers of the GCC.

What the Bahraini revolt lacked in size and duration – reflecting the small size of the state and its citizen population – it made up for intensity.

A mass uprising drawing upon a proportion of the population higher than that of, for example Egypt, and with the most heavily involved workers' movement of the Arab uprisings outside of Tunisia, rendered the territory ungovernable by its Khalifa rulers. An externally backed counterrevolution, as in Syria, was required to do so.

Libya

Far more so than Bahrain or even Syria, the Libyan case most exemplifies the scattering of the co-ordinates of revolution and counter-revolution inherited from the

twentieth century. By October of 2011, the avowedly anti-imperialist and 'revolutionary' regime of Muammar Gaddafi had been overthrown by the revolt, aided by direct bombardment by NATO forces. The 'Dear Brother Leader' himself was dragged, hapless, from a sewer, sodomised with a bayonet and murdered. Although comparatively democratic elections were held in 2012 and 2014, the country soon returned to a state of civil war. Libya's revolution represented the most thorough-going destruction of the political structures of the previous regime. Those structures were themselves so infirm and dependent on the ruling dictator and his supporters that they could not survive his ousting.

The self-proclaimed status of Gaddafi's state as a *Jamahiriya* – a 'state of the masses' – and his historic support of anti-colonial movements attracted support from parts of the global Left. In this view, the uprising of 2011 represented a mere *Fronde* of aggrieved tribes and disgruntled former propertied elements and Islamists in Cyrenaica, seized upon by the United States and NATO as an opportunity to do away with one of the last remaining anti-imperialist regimes.129 In this view, the uprising was 'violent from the start', and therefore the shooting of protestors (comparatively few, according to this interpretation), a measure to preserve law and order: moreover, by giving succour to insurgents motivated by 'tribal or local rivalry', NATO created an incentive for such rebels to persist in violent rebellion and even encouraged those in other countries such as Syria to follow suit.130 The uprising itself, with its concentration in historically propertied and conservative Cyrenaica, might itself be considered a counter-revolution against Gaddafi's radical measures of the 1970s.131

Not all of these critiques are misplaced – but they read backwards from the NATO intervention to the origins of the uprisings, and draw an unjustified contrast between the Libyan uprising and those elsewhere. If the *Jamahiriya* represented a 'state of the masses', it provoked an extremely high proportion of those masses to risk their lives to protest against it in 2011. The initial uprisings in the Eastern and Western cities – followed by an upsurge in Tripoli in August 2011 once it was clear that Gaddafi had fled the city – did represent a mass uprising from below. According to the Arab Transitions survey report for Libya an absolute majority of the Libyan population, 56.6 per cent, actively participated – not just supported but participated – in the revolt. A supermajority of

72.5 per cent supported it. This would equate to over 3.5 million participants and nearly 5 million supporters: if these are accurate figures, they would render the Libyan revolution far more popular and participatory than the Russian, French, Chinese or any other comparator revolution.132

These historically unprecedented statistics call for even more than usual caution. Active participants in revolutions almost always form a minority of the population in a revolutionary situation. The sample of respondents taken by the Arab Transformations survey in Libya is both small and over-represents university graduates and Cyrenaicans: both populations likelier to report participation in and support for the uprising. Even if true levels of participation and support for the Libyan uprising reached only half

the reported levels, however, Libya witnessed an insurrection much broader and more popular than that of Egypt or Tunisia, to say nothing of their historical comparators. Most Libyans –

79.3 per cent – surveyed believed the uprising to be a popular uprising against the regime rather than – the response preferred by only 13.2 per cent – an outside conspiracy. Despite this assessment, only 31 per cent considered the uprising to have had a positive outcome for Libya, indicating that reports of participation in and support for the uprising do not necessarily reflect a retroactive identification with it.133

Nor can the uprising be accurately represented only as a tribal or regional rebellion although, as in any significant revolutionary episode, such axes of distinction did play a part within it. As discussed later, the Libyan tribe did not function as a unit but rather a network and social insurance system: even so, the tribal declarations of 2011 against Gaddafi include sections of some tribes thought loyal to the regime, such as the Warfalla, and couched their opposition in national rather than tribal terms: 39 per cent of these declarations explicitly targeted members of the tribe serving *with* the regime.134

Even where certain towns – Bani Walid, Sirte and Sebha, for example – proved strongholds of support for Gaddafi, these contained revolutionary minorities. In the words of one Bani Walid elder: 'when the revolution began, the Bani Walid split. Within every family, every house, some would go this way, some would go that'.135 Bani Walid fell briefly under the control of these revolutionaries. One of the most distinctive and pernicious aspects of the Libyan uprising was the targeting of darkskinned Libyans and migrants perceived as allies of the regime, and indeed as beneficiaries of Gaddafi's revolution from above that had raised many from conditions of racialised degradation. Yet even some of the dark-skinned Tawergha men subject to racist targeting by Misratan militias after the fall of Gaddafi had themselves fought against the regime.136 Gaddafi's second wife, Safiyya, belonged to the Berasssa tribe of Bayda – a fact that did not prevent the town from falling quickly to the uprising in 2011.137 The revolution split nearly all Libyan communities, albeit far from equally: it was not confined to a few tribes or areas.

The question of the class basis of the Libyan uprising is complicated by the country's similarity, not to its republican neighbours in North Africa, Tunisia and Egypt but to the hydrocarbon monarchies of the Gulf. As in the Gulf monarchies, expatriates made up the majority – 60 per cent – of the Libyan workforce. Where the Gulf states drew mainly on South Asian migration for its labour force, Libya took in workers from Niger, Chad and Mali. The overwhelming majority of employed Libyans worked in the public sector – no barrier, as we have seen in other cases, to labour organisation and revolutionary activity – but lacked the tradition of independent organisation present, for example, in Bahrain.138

Hydrocarbon revenue provided Libyans with a standard of living above that of their neighbours, and the *Jamahiriya* with some substance to its claim of equity: as well as 96 per cent of government revenue.139 At

$16,000 per capita, Libyan Gross National Income compared very favourably with Egypt or Tunisia: but youth unemployment, compounded by the need of many Libyan public sector employees to work two jobs, reached a staggering 48.9 per cent.140

Both support for and participation in the uprising in Libya was strongest amongst those who considered their standard of living 'comfortable'. The oversampling of graduates in this survey must be borne in mind: also that 56.6 per cent of the 'inadequately' off and 45.1 per cent of the 'struggling' reported participating in the uprising, with 65.7 per cent of the former and 55.8 per cent of the latter in support. The better-off a Libyan (under the capacious heading of 'comfortable'), the likelier they were to participate in and support the uprising: but given the profile of the population, most of the participants would still belong to the 'inadequate' or 'adequate' groups who made up 73.9 per cent of the population.141 As noted in the discussions of other cases, the meaning of these self-identifications according to income do not necessarily map onto class positions in the relations of production, especially in a state where most of the labour is done by a migrant workforce – absent from the uprising – and independent workers' organisation completely prohibited.

Unlike neighbouring Tunisia, Egypt or Bahrain, Libyan workers thus lacked any independent institutional space through which to organise opposition to the regime or influence the course of the uprising. Trade unions were 'completely absent' from the rebellion.142 There had been an independent trade union movement of a kind under the monarchy but, under the fiction that workers controlled their enterprises in the *jamahiriya*, independent organisation was banned and the National Trade Union Federation incorporated into the regime in 1972. In an index of the independence of this body, Gaddafi offered the post of president of the NTUFL to opposition personality Abdul Hafiz Ghoga in February 2011 as an inducement to forestall protests after the fall of Ben Ali–needless to say without any form of consultation with its membership.143 The workers of the Libyan national oil company declared their support for the revolution and 'maintained supplies to rebel-held towns, while shutting off spigots leading to those that remained under the colonel's rule'.144 But this represented a decision of the company as a whole, workers and management together, rather than any equivalent of the UGTT's general strike in Tunisia, the Egyptian *tathir,* 'cleansing' of Mubarak-era managers, or Yemen's 'parallel revolution'.

The social basis of the Libyan uprising was broad and stretched across classes in a state that had, in any case, outsourced most extractive and manual work to expatriates. The leadership of the revolutionary movement in the East was largely taken up by professionals: lawyers, religious scholars, and engineers. The ground troops of the rebellion, the militias that formed so quickly in February and March 2011, tended to be recruited from the precariously employed or unemployed male youth of the cities, establishing a division that would spiral into civil war after the fall of Gaddafi.145

Already in 2011, Libya represented the clearest example of a fractured sovereignty of all the revolutionary situations. The fissure was vertical, reaching into the ministries and embassies of the *Jamahiriya*. This fracturing began with protests began in Beng-

hazi on the 17th of February 2011. The cause was support for the lawyer representing victims of the Abu Selim prison massacre of 1996, but the examples of the recently defenestrated Ben Ali and Mubarak undoubtedly lay uppermost in the minds of both protesters and the Colonel. This protest is reported to have attracted around 500 people: one of whom was killed by the police. These events provoked a 'day of anger' consisting of protests across the country the following day. By the 19th of February, 84 protestors were reported to have been killed: funerals for the dead became large protests themselves: 'hundreds' were reported killed by live fire from police and regime forces on that day. The escalation of protest and repression turned to revolution as army units defected to the protestors, and several cities, including Benghazi and Misrata, fell out of regime hands.146 In Benghazi, a young man drove a bulldozer at the headquarters of the *katiba*, the 'brigade' through which the regime maintained an armed presence in the town, allowing 'crowds of protestors' to storm the building.147

Demonstrating the now-familiar revolutionary effervescence, the streets of Benghazi reported one correspondent 'buzzed with impromptu memorials to Qaddafi's victims, political theatre, songs, art and mass open-air prayers...Libyans in their hundreds of thousands recovered their voice'.148 The police force having retreated or collapsed, judges took to directing the city's traffic in their regalia while in Tobruk, a historic centre of support for the old monarchy, '[h]undreds of families were racing around town waving tricolour flags [of the pre-Gaddafi Senussi monarchy]'.149 As elsewhere in the uprisings, women's 'full participation in the revolution and on the front line' was 'crucial', only to be later sidelined as the mere helpmeets of heroic male relatives: the *um al-shahid* ('mother of the martyr') or *um al-tha'ir* ('mother of the revolutionary').150

The fall of Benghazi to the popular uprising produced a competitor to the Gaddafi regime, the 'National Transitional Council'. Composed largely of lawyers, academics, and other professionals from the North East of the country, the NTC was headed by Mustafa Abdul Jalil, who had been Gaddafi's minister of justice barely two weeks before. Mahmoud Jibril, former head of the National Economic Development Board and protege of Saif-al-Islam, served as interim prime minister: a status that gave rise to the denunciation by revolutionary militias of the NTC as part of *jam'at Saif*, 'Saif's gang' of would-be neoliberal technocrats prominent before the revolution.151 These former regime

figures made up one identifiable trend bloc within the NTC and included erstwhile comrades of Gaddafi in the Free Officers' movement and early days of the *jamahiriya*, such as Omar al-Hariri and the interior minister Abdel Fattah Younes, official commander of the revolutionary military forces.152 Besides, these ex-functionaries served a crop of 'opposition figures' hailing from the 'aristocratic and bourgeois families who had dominated Libya during the monarchy'. Making up the remainder, and soonest sidelined in the aftermath of the revolution, was an array of human rights advocates and internal dissidents.153 Diplomats, bureaucrats and chunks of the historically neglected armed forces began to defect to the revolution – 8,000 soldiers were reported

to have defected in the East in February 2011, and by June perhaps only a fifth of the force remained.154

Both the NTC and the ramshackle militias fighting Gaddafi found the task of extending their writ beyond the original restive zones much harder than expelling the regime from them in the first place. In February and early March of 2011, the anti-Gaddafi forces, powered by little more than revolutionary enthusiasm, surged hugger-mugger across the desert towards Tripoli. Ill-disciplined and haphazardly armed, the barely trained rebels were soon turned back by Gaddafi's most reliable brigades and irregulars, at least 50,000 strong.155 This reversal was to prove vital to the outcome of the revolution and civil war, because it provided the *causus belli* for NATO intervention.

UN Security Council Resolution 1973 was passed on the 17th of March, authorising the implementation of a no-fly zone and the 'protection of civilians': by no small irony, three days after the Saudi-led intervention to crush the revolution in Bahrain. Resolution 1973 was interpreted expansively enough to mean aiding the revolutionary forces in their overthrow of the regime, and the sending of weaponry, financial aid and special forces troops by Qatar, Jordan – UNSC 1973 having the backing of the Arab League – and NATO members.156 The NTC and the broader revolutionary populace in the East had been wary of external intervention at the beginning of the uprising but as Gaddafi's counteroffensive threatened, this hesitation was dropped in favour of a fullthroated demand for a no-fly zone. Aerial bombardment of regime forces began on the 19th of March but progress was slower than expected. Major hubs such as Ajdabiya and Maria Brega were taken only with the utmost difficulty. Gadaffi's home turf in Sirte resisted until the very end of the campaign.157 A death toll reaching perhaps the tens of thousands was wracked up throughout the NATO campaign.158

After nearly six months of bombing, having proven able to mobilise far more of his supporters and clients than either the revolutionaries or the NATO powers expected, Gaddafi and his entourage fled Tripoli in August 2011. Once the bombing began, Gaddafi had changed from threatening to cleanse the country 'alley by alley' to offering a series of peace plans, each one conceding more than the last: these were seen – no doubt accurately – by the NTC and its external allies as evidence of Gaddafi's weakness and duly rebuffed.159 Responsibility for the liberation of Tripoli is disputed, but most accounts revolve around three elements: a ground assault from the West led by militias from the town of Misrata, a NATO air offensive that paved the way for those militias and an uprising within the city. Tripoli's NTC members were keen to emphasise the uprising of the 20th of August as the driving force – claiming that NATO did not bomb its promised targets, and the Western militias only showed up two days afterwards. Tripolitanians in the two weeks after the flight of Gaddafi established forms of autonomous governance not dissimilar to those seen elsewhere in the Arab uprisings. One correspondent described how the uprising displayed an 'inspiring' degree of popular participation, with neighbourhood councils in working-class areas organising their own services and security: with Gaddafi now gone, 'Tripolitanians created the very

social system he had taught but never realized...a decentralised network of grassroots, nonpartisan people's committees'.160

This network never coalesced into any kind of governing force. Instead, Gaddafi's old order was dismantled, but a new one was never established. Chased from the capital, the colonel, his family and supporters found refuge in his birthplace of Sirte. Surrounded by rebels in October 2011, Gaddafi's convoy was targeted by NATO air strikes while attempting to leave the town. Gaddafi was dragged from his hiding-place in a tunnel, captured by a detachment of militiamen, sodomised with a bayonet and summarily executed.

The NATO intervention proved crucial in aiding the victory of the NTC and its allied militias over Gaddafi: nonetheless, the reason that a revolutionary situation of divided sovereignty held in Libya was because of a mass uprising from below, not external regime change. NATO intervened into a revolutionary uprising that was already happening.

Yemen

Yemen, the poorest state in the Arab world, also saw some of the most profound instances of a breach in the normal social and political order in 2011 – a true instance of Armburst's anti-structure. Protests in Yemen were already a familiar sight by 2011 under a comparatively pluralistic regime. They were especially common in the South of the country, where dissatisfaction was widespread with the settlement of the 1994 civil war that had confirmed the unification of the Yemen Arab Republic and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. The existing opposition 'Joint Meeting Parties', uniting among others the Yemeni Socialist Party (the former ruling PDRY ruling party) and the broadly Islamist Islah, was genuinely independent of the ruling General People's Congress (GPC): although they were still, especially Islah, enmeshed in a system of patronage and tribal power-broking that extended beyond the ruling party. Further complicating the picture was the armed Zaydi revivalist movement of the Houthis, or Ansar Allah, who had fought six wars in ten years against the state in the Northern massif. When the uprising began in late January 2011, however, these actors were mainly absent. As elsewhere, the frustrated youth of an overwhelmingly young country took the lead in the protest movement.

Surveys of participation in the Yemeni revolution are sparse, but by mid-February 'tens of thousands' were demonstrating in Sana'a, Ta'iz, Aden and other cities.161 Following attacks on demonstrations in Ta'iz – the stronghold of the movement – and Sana'a, a large demonstration was called for on the 25th of February. Independent media claimed over a million protestors gathered in Sana'a on that day. This figure is almost certainly an exaggeration but, nonetheless, the epicentre of Ta'iz was occupied by around 100,000 protestors, with many tens of thousands in over cities throughout the country.162 In testimony to the longevity and size of the protest movement, even nine months later, tens of thousands marched from Ta'iz to Sana'a to protest against the GCC-backed transition agreement of November 2011.163

Who made up the Yemeni revolutionary subject? Survey data here is scarcer than in other cases. Yemen in 2011 remained a predominantly agrarian society, albeit rapidly urbanising and ruled by an elite with aspirations to oil rentier status. The country was also the poorest in the Arab world: about half the population living in poverty; 55 per cent of the labour force engaged in an agricultural sector that produced only 12 per cent of GDP; unemployment rates of 35 per cent rising to 70 per cent amongst the young.164 It would be unusual for such conditions not to produce demands for social redress amongst the protestors and mobilisation along class lines. Yemen may have lacked the centres of industrial gravity visible in the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions – the phosphate mines of Gafsa or the textile factories of the Nile Delta – but workers' organisation and strike action still played a central role before and during the uprising. Oil workers, as well as teachers, construction workers and dockers, struck throughout 2008 and 2009, culminating in a nationwide general strike – in the face of widespread repression – in 2010. Particularly remarkable was the organisation of the garbage collectors, mostly belonging to the outcaste groups of the *muhammashiin*, whose strikes tackled not just low wages and insecure working conditions but deeply-embedded practices of racist and sexist discrimination.165

These workers movements formed part of the 'parallel revolution' to the political transition proposed in Yemen. As in the Egyptian *tathir* '[f]rom petrol stations to government newspapers, workers' turned 'on their superiors, storming offices to demand reforms and the dismissal of managers whom they claim are corrupt beneficiaries of the regime'.166 The parallel revolution identified local hierarchies as instances of the national regime. Beginning with the national airline and eventually spreading even to the military newspaper *26 September* – briefly subject to workers' control – 'the floodgates' opened, driving out bosses from institutions around the country.167 These included mutinies in the air force, the Republican Guard, coast guard, police and Central Security Forces; all-out strikes at, as well as, the national airline and *September 26* newspaper; the 'Yemen Economical Corporation' (the investment arm of the armed forces); the Masila oil field (the country's largest); the state radio and television companies in Aden and Sana'a and the *Thawra* media corporation; the central audit office; the department of agriculture and irrigation; the country's five main universities; and the departments of industry and education. In short, 'in almost every governorate, strikes...affected many government and private offices and establishments, including schools, prisons, hospitals, and electricity and sanitation departments'.168

Echoing the tactics of their counterparts in Cairo and Tunis, Yemeni revolutionaries in 2011 established of encampments – especially in Ta'iz and outside Sana'a University, renamed 'Change Square'. As in the other Arab uprisings, these camps became pre-figurations of the alternative society the revolutionaries wished to see. This was revolution as process rather than consequence. The encampments were marked by a hostility to the organised parties and political representation, and a strong dose of horizontalist direct democracy: typical of the moments of revolutionary effervescence and collective self-hood that characterise revolutionary situations. Answering 'those

who ask who represents the revolution', the newly established *Sawt al-Thawra* ('Voice of the Revolution') newspaper declared:

No one represents us and no one will represent us. Every one of us is he one leader of the Revolution! ... if any party or state thinks we will put forward a representative then we are in agreement only on the condition that it provides a meeting hall big enough for twenty five million people...169

The protest encampments brought together students and tribespeople, Houthis and Salafis, Southerners and Northerners, in acts of collective self-governance and cultural expression to rival any in Cairo or Tunis: a revolutionary mobilisation 'more widespread and long-lasting than anywhere else in the region'.170 The participation of women, including leaders such as the Islah activist Tawakul Karman, was particularly marked.171 Darker-skinned Yemenis–those belonging to the historically marginalised caste of the '*muhamishiin*' and Afro-Yemenis in the Red Sea port of Hodeidah – 'filled their own Freedom Square with banners and chants and insurrectionary wall-art', celebrating the overthrow of Gaddafi and praying for those killed by Bashar al-Assad in Syria.172

This effervescent movement and the 'parallel revolution' interacted with existing divisions in the ruling class, especially the military rivalry between Ali Abdullah Saleh and his former ally Ali Mohsen Ahmar. These movements nonetheless posed the threat of unifying political and social revolution. The split that emerged in the Yemeni state after March 2011 served to sever these once more. On the 18th of March, Saleh attempted to regain the initiative by dispersing the protests in Sana'a using live fire: the resultant 45 deaths prompted Ali Mohsen and his allies in the Hashid tribal federation (closely associated with the Islah party) to step over to the side of the revolution. The patronage of such a close regime figure – even if a rival to the president – was far from welcome amongst many of the revolutionaries.173 The clashes within the armed forces that resulted in the spring and summer of 2011 were part of this intra-regime rivalry.174 With the protection of Mohsen's divisions, however, and the numbers of the JMP, the protests nonetheless swelled to even greater size–and became increasingly gender-segregated, thanks to the influence of these established ruling class fractions.175

The revolutionaries' wariness about Mohsen and the JMP reflected an understanding that these parties – especially Islah – were never completely separate from the regime against which the protests were mounted. Rather, Islah – its combination of Salafists, Muslim Brotherhood modernists and the mobilising power of the Hashid – resembled an outer layer of the regime, shading into the society it ruled. The composite ruling class of sheikhs and officers enriched by access to the state in an otherwise bleak economic landscape, interpenetrated both Islah and the General People's Congress (GPC), Saleh's party organ. In November 2011, a transitional agreement was cobbled together under Saudi auspices, providing for the gentle easing out of Saleh himself. The president was to be replaced by his deputy, Hadi, in an uncontested election, and Saleh would remain immune and in charge of the GPC. A 'National Dialogue Conference' would then deliberate on the constitutional structures appropriate to the new Yemen, without dangerously troubling the rule of the men of the old order. This

was the 'Yemeni model' of negotiated revolution that the Gulf powers and the United States offered as the solution to other uprisings then at the tipping point of civil war, such as that in Syria. The advantage of this model was that it would prevent a disorderly demise of the regime: especially worrisome as the 'parallel revolution' aroused concerns in Washington, as well as in Riyadh.176 The agreement represented a preservation rather than overthrow of the old regime – a counter-revolution in the guise of a transitional framework.

Conclusion: From Revolutionary Situations to CounterRevolutions

Revolutionary situations, it will be recalled, represent a breach in the usual form of social and political order: a time of 'anti-structure' in which alternative ways of ruling and producing are superposed. Experienced as moments of collective liberation and expanded self-hood by their participants, they also inspire fear and uncertainty, not only in the partisans of the old regime but in the more ambiguously placed layers of the population.

All of the six cases examined here experienced such revolutionary situations. They all emerged from mass, class-based uprisings from below. The degree of participation in these revolts varied but, while not always easy to establish, reached an extent unprecedented in the histories of protest in the individual states, and amongst the highest of all historically recorded revolutionary waves. The revolutionary subjects that carried out these uprisings were variegated but mostly revolved around a plebeian core alienated by the old regimes' embrace of neoliberal *infitah* policies in the preceding years and decades. In some cases, such as Egypt, Yemen and Tunisia, huge strike waves were accompanied by a 'parallel revolution' of social struggle.

These revolts from below fractured the existing state and, at least for a time, produced alternative sources of legitimacy and rule – including some that prefigured practices of actual direct revolutionary democracy, rather than the facsimile of such proclaimed by some of the old regimes. That these revolutionary situations did not, in the end, give rise to lasting revolutionary outcomes (with the exception of a limited transition to constitutional democracy in Tunisia) renders them neither unusual in the history of revolutions nor inexplicable in the analytical treatment of them. To understand this outcome, however, requires an account of what comes between a revolutionary situation and its subsequent result–counter-revolution, in other words. In the following chapters, I establish how the Arab counter-revolutions were able to succeed based on attracting support from below and without, beginning with the contrast of political revolution and counter-revolution in Tunisia and Egypt, respectively.

4. Political Revolutions and Counter-Revolutions Tunisia and Egypt

Tunisia, the first, and Egypt, the largest, of the Arab uprisings present contrasting instances of a similar outcome: political revolution. Where the Tunisian *intifada* produced a – shaky and beleaguered but nonetheless real – constitutional democracy, the outcome of Egypt's revolutionary situation was a counter-revolution *pur et dur*. The renewed military rule of Abdelfattah el-Sisi struck against not just the elected government of Muslim Brotherhood President Mohammed Morsi but the entire principle of popular control of the Egyptian state. What both revolutions had in common was that they instituted some form of political transition without collapsing into civil war or outside intervention. In Tunisia, that transition was limited and then managed in order to maintain the social supremacy of the old elite under new democratic guise: in Egypt, it was reversed with exemplary violence and no small degree of popular support.

What accounts for this divergence? The two states differ widely in size, with the Tunisian population barely more than a tenth that of Egypt; of colonial inheritance with Tunis a former French protectorate boasting the earliest constitution in the Arab world, Egypt a would-be hegemon made British dependency; and strategic centrality, Tunisia occupying a largely secondary place in the calculations of a secondary power – France – postNasserist Egypt playing the role of Eastern Mediterranean lynchpin in the system of US dominance of the region, assured by an annual subvention of

$1 billion or more.1 These historic differences notwithstanding, most explanations for the (comparative) success of the Tunisian revolutionary struggle and the failure of the Egyptian turn on the character of the respective protagonists. In Tunisia, a constitutionally minded military and an Islamist movement of moderate conservative ambitions (Ennahda) avoided the head-on confrontation seen in Egypt between two contenders (the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces or SCAF on the one hand and the Muslim Brotherhood on the other) equally committed to a monopoly on power.2

Although this version captures some of the consequential differences between the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions – never entirely separate events – it leaves unconsidered the nature of the *counter*-revolutions in both states. Here, there were similarities as well as differences, particularly in the intertwining of political and social counter-revolution and the centrality of the 'ghosts' (to use Sara Salem's term) of national

developmentalist revolutions from above, to building a political subject capable of carrying through a counter-revolution. To account for both the differences and similarities in this project requires consideration of the aspects of counter-revolution highlighted in Chapter 2. What policies of repression and exclusion constituted the Tunisian (social) and Egyptian (social and political) counterrevolution? From what strategic core did these issue – what, in other words, constituted the counter-revolution from above in these countries? By what means did they attempt, successfully or otherwise, to suture their project to a popular base in the counter-revolution from below? How far, and what form, did these counter-revolutionaries comprise trans-and international alliances – counter-revolution from without – across the Middle East region and beyond?

Counter-Revolution from Above

Counter-revolution as a project of reversing a revolution, or preventing an incipient one, requires some kind of policy of confronting and overcoming the revolution. Counter-revolution implies then some kind of policymakers: counter-revolutionaries from above. In the following section, I identify who these counter-revolutionaries were in the Tunisian and Egyptian cases – the *azlam* and *feloul*, respectively – and the means they adopted to attempt turn back or forestall revolutionary change. Although both *feloul* and *azlam* shared a class profile, belonging to the majority fraction of businessmen connected to the old regimes, their capabilities and policies differed. Where Tunisia's counterrevolutionaries formed a political party to negotiate with the Islamists (with whom they differed little in terms of economic policy as opposed to social and cultural milieu) to protect their wealth, in Egypt the SCAF found the Muslim Brotherhood an unreliable partner and embarked upon wholesale repression to erase the entire revolutionary experience by coercive and carceral means.

Tunisia

The notion of a Tunisian counter-revolution, or Tunisian counterrevolutionaries, is likely to be taken as tendentious. The gains of

Tunisia's political revolution seem real enough. These included a nationally accepted constitution guaranteeing freedoms of expression, assembly and conscience, as well as equality of opportunity between men and women; substantially free and fair elections on the basis of that constitution for both legislature and executive; and a coalition government formed between the two main political traditions of the country expressing the legitimate results of those elections. Many in the Arab world and beyond would be envious of such a successful transition, even if the ability of this system to produce a coherent executive had run aground by the end of the decade. Nonetheless, the political transformation wrought by the Tunisians benefitted primarily Islamic and reformist currents – Ennahda – who had not been their primary participants. The social struggles that had animated the uprising continued through these political and constitutional wrangling, giving rise both to the appeal of counter-revolutionaries as the party of order and to their potential as allies against – newly empowered – Islamist administrations committed to the social status quo.

How then is Ennahda to be seen through the prism of revolution and counter-revolution? For the partisans of the movement, there was no doubt. The revolution was one against the compulsory *laïcité* of Ben Ali and Bourguiba, and anyone associated with such principles – or indeed simply the opponents of Islamism – constituted counter-revolutionaries. Such was the position of the 'League for the Protection of the Revolution', which mounted physical attacks not only against figures from the old regime but the UGTT and activists on the Left.3 Ennahda itself betrayed an incomprehension, prevalent in its professional and bourgeois base, of the idea of strikes and the participation of organised labour in an ongoing social uprising. Ennahda activists pointedly dropped rubbish in public squares during a sanitation workers' strike, for example. The party's attitude was summed up by Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali in 2012: 'We don't believe in this theory of a class struggle...We don't need what they call "labor negotiations" or pressure to grant pay rises, we have other priorities at the moment'.4

The contradictory position of Ennahda in Tunisia encapsulated that of Islamist parties and movements in all of the Arab revolutions – and not just Sunni ones, as predominantly Shi'a organisations such as Bahrain's al-Wefaq faced a similar bind. Forming the largest single component of political opposition to the regimes, often thanks to the historic compromises of the Left with those regimes in their national developmentalist phases, Islamist parties such as Ennahda were the obvious likely beneficiaries of any transition to democratic governance. Their substantial membership and support bases, acquired with painstaking effort at establishing social and moral hegemony, shared in the aspiration for more politically open and more equitably prosperous societies that motivated so many of the revolutionaries: justice and development, as the Islamists' electoral fronts were usually called.5 Yet such Islamists (distinct from the insurgent groups such as al-Qa'ida and ISIS) stood strongly in the conservative tradition of corrective reform rather than revolution: Hassan al-Banna, echoing Friedrich Ebert, having made clear that '[t]he Brotherhood does not believe in revolution and does not rely on it in achieving its goals and if it happened, we will [sic] not adopt it'.6 Drawing their prime support from businessmen (large and small) excluded by the *ancien regimes* but frequently benefiting from their economic policies, Al-Banna's inheritors adopted the position after 2011 of defending (unfinished) political revolutions while promoting social counter-revolution. The threat of Islamist rule, thus, provided a particularly potent means by which remnants of the old regime were able to mobilise a counter-revolutionary subject (of which more below). Such mobilisation drew upon the 'afterlives' of state-led national development which Islamists had generally opposed.7 In Tunisia, this took the form of a contest between two versions of an imagined Tunisian modernity: the Islamist one rooted in Ennahda and its towering intellectual influence, Rachid Ghannouchi and a *laic* idea of *Tunisianité.* Both were based in largely middle-class constituencies but refracted through them were the geographical and class divisions that had exploded in 2011.

The confrontation between these trends would heavily influence the course of Tunisia's political revolution – and social counter-revolution. A new phase opened with the formation of the Constituent Assembly in late 2011. The executive that governed during this period was made up of a 'Troika' of the Congress for the Republic (CPR) of Moncef Marzouki (who became president), the notionally social-democratic Ettakatol and Ennahda. The Constituent Assembly decided in October 2013 that the first real parliamentary and presidential elections would be held in June 2013.

The revolutionary crisis of 2011, thus, metastasized into, on the one hand, a constitutional conflict between Islamists and their opponents and, on the other, a series of political assassinations by armed Salafists. The latter, however, was notable, in that the targets were not figures of the old regime but of the Left, Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahimi. The UGTT, perceiving a direct attack, called a general strike in summer of 2013. The UGTT, together with UTICA, the 'Tunisian Union for Industry, Trade and Handicrafts', the Lawyers' Association, and the Tunisian League for Human Rights, formed the so-called Quartet. The Quartet opposed Ennahda and produced what they called a 'road map' to a transition under a technocratic government. This eventually occurred with the resignation – a self-denying ordinance of sorts – of the Troika and Ennahda in late 2013 in favour of an administration under the businessman and industry minister Mehdi Joma'a. Ghannouchi outlined the logic behind Ennahda's withdrawal: 'it was important for us to avoid any sort of confrontation to guarantee stability the region was in trouble, any sort of confrontation, any failure would lead to chaos'.8 The Troika was dissolved but not the constitutional drafting process, the final draft being released in February 2014.

Ghannouchi's wager cost Ennahda its political dominance but not, as in the case of the Egyptian MB, its legal existence. In the 2014 parliamentary elections, the party took 27.79 per cent of the vote, losing a fifth of its vote from the previous election, and its parliamentary representation reduced to 69 seats. Gaining from a standing start was the party of the incumbent president, Beji Caid Essebsi, taking 37.56 per cent of the vote and 86 seats in the assembly.9 Unlike in Egypt, where the old regime reasserted itself against an elected Islamist government, in Tunisia the Islamists agreed to take a subordinate role in government with its – elected–remnants. A political revolution had permitted Ennahda at least halfway into power: accompanied by a social counter-revolution to preserve both the wealth (and liberty) of the old regime, advancing the same neoliberal policies as those of Ben Ali. The second Nidaa Tounes prime minister, Youssef Chahed, found his plans in this regard frustrated by the opposition of the UGTT and continuing protest movement to such a degree that the IMF postponed a tranche of their planned aid. Ennahda echoed the criticism of the international financial institutions, that 'to have a coalition government...makes implementing decisions difficult'.10 What were the origins of the leading force in these coalitions, Nidaa Tounes, the 'Call of Tunisia'? The party represented an adaptation of the *azlam* or 'cronies' – the Tunisian phrase for the remnants of the Ben Ali regime and its economic beneficiaries – to the success of the revolution and a compromise

with the forces it had called forth, particularly in the occupation of the Casbah. The counter-revolutionaries had begun to regroup early. Even in the immediate aftermath of the fall of Ben Ali, 'managers, civil servants and small business owners' gathered at the Kobba square to mark a counter-protest against the Casbah and instead demand a return to authoritarian normality. This demand to end the revolutionary period, for the UGTT to act within the economic bounds of a trade union grew louder as a wave of strikes and protest actions –

'social anarchy' – spread beyond the hitherto most-organised sectors.11

Initially, however, the counter-revolutionaries were hampered by the destruction of Ben Ali's formidable political machine, the *Rassemblement*

Constitutionnel Démocratique (RCD). Ben Ali's 'meticulous grid of control' functioned through the party and police that would be physically destroyed in 2011.12 The RCD operated an apparatus of surveillance, control and upward mobility. No mere shell of an organisation, the party formed the central interface between Tunisians and the regime that ruled them: a relationship from which they sought and gained benefits, as well as repression. The party claimed a membership, undoubtedly exaggerated, of 2 million people. These members were organised into some 7,500 residential and 2,700 workplace cells. Even if the majority of the members of these cells were inactive, the structures themselves were essential means of intelligence – gathering by the regime and reciprocal distribution of favours and opportunities – for example, for the licensing of small businesses. The ambitious could establish themselves as local notables by diligently rising through the ranks of the party. Public money paid for some 10,000 RCD functionaries. The *omda* or local headman dispensed favours but also, along with the police, formed a node of the formal economy – providing, for example, credit ratings. Such was the role of the RCD for its members.13 For those outside of the organisation, obstacles were placed in the way of everyday transactions, extending to the 'social death' of those identified with Islamist organisations and excluding them from health care, education, and economic life.14 Physically destroying the infrastructure and networks of this party was a revolutionary act in Tunisia: reconstituting them, as Nidaa Tounes sought to do, a counter-revolutionary one.

Of course, this structure of patronage and surveillance did not simply disappear without fight in 2011. The ex-RCD mounted several attempts to reconstitute themselves before reaching the successful model of Nidaa Tounes. These supporters of the old regime did mount initial forays after the departure of Ben Ali, particularly targeting the UGTT and its leadership – a campaign that involved reprising the tactics of the late 1970s, burning offices and harassing activists. The destruction of the physical and organisational infrastructure of the old ruling party temporarily deprived the *azlam* of the means for political action. In the eyes of the UGTT rank-and-file activists, however, 'ex-RCD members, bosses and businessmen' and 'RCD partisans and their allies' having been spared the 'fatal blow' came to regroup at the expense of the 'famished and marginalized' who had authored the revolution.15

The Constituent Assembly elections in 2011 allowed the old regime remnants such an opportunity to attempt to re-group. Even the largest such fraction, *Al-Moubadara* (the initiative), mustered little support. A rash of parties claiming Bourguiba's inheritance soon emerged. A more successful incarnation was the *Petition Populaire*, led by Hachmi

Hamdi, a UK-based media millionaire, and involving several former RCD personnel. The party took an unexpected 8 per cent of the vote and 26 seats in the CA.16 Only with the foundation of Nidaa Tounes, able after 2011 to present itself as the opposition to Ennahda, did former cadres of the RCD develop a successful political organisation. The party was founded by Beji Caid Essebsi – once Bourguiba's minister of the interior, minister for defence, foreign minister and President of the Chamber of Deputies under Ben Ali. Far from a close member of the *azlam*, Essebsi was strongly identified with the pre-Ben Ali Bourguibist state.17 Appointed interim prime minister in response to the second Casbah occupation of 2011, Essebsi resigned willingly once the Constituent Assembly elections produced a new cabinet, the 'Troika' dominated by Ennahda. Nidaa Tounes profited from, and based its sole appeal around, the supposed threat posed by Islamism of the latter party. Never an entirely coherent project, Nidaa Tounes, thus, brought together two groups opposed to Ennahda. The first was composed largely of former RCD members. These included well-known associates of Ben Ali's infamously corrupt son-in-law Slim Chiboub, fixers and gobetweens such as Raouf Khamassi and Mohammed Ghariani. These socalled Destourians, largely associated with Essebsi's son Hafedh, both controlled the party machinery and proved more amenable to a compromise with Ennahda that would facilitate measures such as the 'economic reconciliation law'.18 A second faction, who resigned from the party in 2016 over its co-operation with Ennahda, consisted of a grouping committed to what they claimed was modernist social democracy. These included figures from beyond the core of the old regime, such as the former head of the UGTT Taieb Baccouche and Boujemaa Remili, the former head of the Tunisian Communist Party. Not only Baccouche but others from the UGTT joined Nidaa Tounes, although few had been active at the grassroots in 2011. Nonetheless, Nidaa Tounes was dominated by the former *RCDistes*: men such as Faouzi

Loumi of the Elloumi group, an $800 million portfolio.19

The party's central objective was the judicial and economic rehabilitation of the *azlam*. These efforts proceeded along two tracks. The first, the 'economic rehabilitation law' gave legal force to Nidaa Tounes' social counter–revolution. In 2011, revolutionaries had attacked the assets of the *azlam*, seeing in them the corrupt accumulation of the country's wealth in private hands. Nidaa Tounes gave notice of their intent to roll back any such assault on the assets, not even of the Tunisian wealthy in general, but that of the particular clique around Ben Ali. The economic reconciliation for which the law provided consisted of giving individual immunity outside the constitution for 7,000 individuals suspected of corrupt association with the old regime.20 In return, the law stated, the individuals thus named would pay fines and compensation for their corrupt gains back to the exchequer, then supposedly to be invested in the impoverished

regions.21 Needless to say, the inhabitants of those regions failed to see the proposed benefits and mounted several large protests against the law. The law was passed with the support of Ennahda in the autumn of 2017.

The second concern of Nidaa Tounes was to frustrate the process of transitional justice for the crimes of the Ben Ali regime, especially those committed in its death throes. To address these, a Truth and Dignity Commission was established in June 2014, along with the model of similar forms of 'transitional justice' elsewhere. The premise of this commission, as in its counterparts elsewhere, was that the injustices that formed its terms of reference were a closed chapter and, once adequate moral recompense had been made by both parties, Tunisia would be able to move on. Nida Tounes representatives attended not a single session of the body.22 Through the political institutions established by the revolution, and in co-operation with their Islamist rivals in those institutions, the *azlam* were able to prosecute a social counter-revolution to protect their wealth and avoid any reckoning for the crimes of the *ancien regime.* The extreme repression and physical and political exclusion of revolutionaries – undoing the sense of collective self-hood and solidarity experienced in the revolutionary situation – was far less marked in Tunisia.

This is not to say that Tunisia's social counter-revolution, embedded within a political revolution, was entirely peaceful. Before the fall of Ben Ali, the siege tactics employed by the army and the killings by the *Brigades D'Ordre Public* have already been noted. In the last days of Ben Ali, two protestors were killed in Manzel Bouzayne on the 24th of December. Further killings were concentrated in the week before the flight of the dictator and in the poorer areas of the country, the interior and the working-class suburbs of Tunis.23 The BOP, in some cases disguised by masks or civilian clothing, seem to have been responsible for many of the killings.24 Of course, as well as killings, the police injured and arrested many protestors: 1,200, according to the Ministry of Interior, of whom 382 were referred to the courts.25

During the crisis of 2012–2013, the death toll of state repression of demonstrations was lower: two reported deaths, both at events organised by Salafists. Thirty injuries were reported, the majority of these at a local demonstration by street vendors in Bizerte and the remainder at Salafist events. Figures for arrests vary widely, between 429 and 701 for the year: however, the largest numbers of arrests (274 in Tunis and 254 in Kairouan) was reported at the attempted gathering of the Salafist Ansar al-Sharia, held responsible for the series of political assassinations shaking the country, in May of 2013. The second-largest number of arrests (between 132 and 150) was recorded at the funeral of Chokri Belaid (attended by tens of thousands, possibly 50,000, people) following clashes with police at the edges of the procession. The use of tear gas was reported on eight occasions, although this is almost certainly an underestimate.26

As noted above, one of the prime reasons given for this comparative absence of extreme counter-revolutionary repression in Tunisia is the independence and historical weakness of the country's military. There is some truth to this claim. Ben Ali favoured the repressive apparatus of the police, especially after the allegation – fabricated by

parts of the interior ministry – of a coup attempt by Ennahda supporters in the army in 1992. Soon afterwards, the budget of interior ministry swelled to 165 per cent of the ministry of defence and remained there until 2011. Provincial governors from military backgrounds were rare under Ben Ali, only one being appointed between 1987 and 2011. The military reflected the dominance, economic and political, of the prosperous coastal Sahel as against the interior: before 2011, 40 per cent of the officers appointed to the Supreme Council of the Armies hailed from this region, home to 24 per cent of the overall population.27

Unlike Egypt or Syria, the Tunisian military was neither inherited from a colonial power as a means of upward mobility nor swollen by repeated bouts of combat with an enemy such as Israel. The armed forces were essentially created by Bourguiba from pre-existing French and Beylical forces, and came to number a modest 40,500 by 2011. The comparison with a state such as Egypt (ten times as many men under arms) is stark. In a further contrast with Egypt, the revolution came to permeate the Tunisian armed forces rather than the other way around, with chiefs-of-staff increasingly appointed from backgrounds in the interior rather than the Sahel.28

Despite this qualified penetration of the military by the same divisions that traversed the Tunisian revolution, counter-terrorism and security still provided the rubric for counter-revolution. A new counter-terrorism law, adopted in the wake of the deadly attack on tourist sites in 2015, applied a nebulous definition of the phenomenon although not in terms as draconian as the corresponding law in Cairo. Nonetheless, protests continued: 4,416 recorded in 2015, 8,713 in 2016, 10,452 in 2017.29 Tunisia was, in effect, suspended between an ongoing revolutionary movement and a counter-revolutionary project – the latter having preserved the wealth and social status of the *azlam* but proved unable to eradicate the experience of revolutionary mobilisation. This continuing protest movement, drawing on the dissatisfaction with progress in achieving the social objectives of the revolution, formed the backdrop to the unexpected victory of the outsider candidate Qais Said in the presidential elections of 2019.30

Egypt

The counter-revolution in Egypt, nine times more populous than Tunisia and occupying a correspondingly far greater position of economic, cultural and geopolitical heft, offers a pertinent contrast to the political transition achieved in the latter. The inspiration that the Tunisian uprising offered to the Egyptians, and the simultaneity of their experiments in constitution-making and institution-building, rendered the contrast between their outcomes all the starker. Where, a decade after the uprisings, Tunisian post-revolutionary politics was sufficiently robust to produce an outsider president, Qais Said, demanding that the unfulfilled promises of the revolution be made good, Egyptians faced a military dictatorship harsher than that of the president they had deposed in 2011. Mohammed Morsi, the first democratically elected holder of that office in the history of the republic, died in the prison to which he had been banished by the putsch of July 2013. The coup regime, under the leadership of Field Marshal Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, pursued the steady eradication of the physical, politi-

cal and cultural legacy of the uprising: Mohamed Bamyeh's 'psychological' aspect of the counter-revolution that sought to crush the expanded selves of the revolutionary moment and thereby to foreclose the alternatives it offered.31 What Tunisia's *azlam* sought through electoral means, Egypt's equivalent *feloul* were able to achieve through military coup and full-bore repression.

Who were these *feloul*? Clustered around the hard-core of the state embodied in the army (and its sometime competitor, the internal security forces) were a well-connected bourgeoisie and its penumbra in the media, higher education and the upper management of state institutions. The 25th January revolution was, in large part, directed against the developmental model of infitah that had produced this ruling class. The IMF/World Bank Structural Adjustment Plan in 1991 had accelerated the policies first adopted by Sadat in the mid-1970s, providing for a wave of privatisations, especially in the mid-2000s. Private capital came to predominate in the Egyptian ruling class, albeit with businessmen occupying key positions in the state apparatus, concentrated in 'two dozen family conglomerates'.32 It was largely these Mubarak-era businessmen who would come to be known as *feloul*. The military was not marginalised, however, but rather adapted to the new dispensation, acquiring substantial interests in energy, infrastructure and real estate.33 Although a division between a more neoliberal new generation and more cautious military men was certainly visible in the Egyptian elite, as Amy Austin Holmes notes, the Egyptian ruling class was remarkable in its *lack* of a 'dissident faction' open to the uprising. Not a single one of the 500 members of the Egyptian Businessmen's Association donated money to support the protests. Only Naguib Sawiris, owner of the large Orascom conglomerate, was prepared to issue verbal support for the uprising: even then, when ordered by the regime to shut down his mobile phone network on the 28th of January 2011, Sawiris complied.34

The first forays of the Egyptian counter-revolution were not promising. In the fag-end of his rule, Mubarak relied upon the despised *baltageya* – plain-clothes thugs in the orbit of the state security services – to attack and disperse the protests. These forces were too few in number, too associated with the Mubarak period and their violence too obvious to be effective. Only with the coming to power of the Muslim Brotherhood in 2012 did the potential for unity between SCAF, the *feloul* and parts of the former revolutionary coalition emerge: a movement from below, offering support to the repressive policy of counter-revolution from above pursued by the coup regime.

Although the Muslim Brotherhood were to be the first victims of that counter-revolution, SCAF at first found in the organisation – its leadership concentrated in the religiously minded bourgeoisie hitherto excluded from regime connections – a willing partner.35 The Brotherhood, having thrown their crucial weight behind the 18 days revolt only its latter stages, now stood ready to play the role of moderates in a classic 'transition pact', restraining any remaining revolutionary energies and directing them into parliamentary form.36 The result was a fracture in the revolutionary coalition, as those who sought a continuing revolution, and the overhaul of the Egyptian state, including SCAF, which regarded the Brotherhood's strategic alignment with SCAF

and electoral orientation as both betrayal and power-grab.37 The Brothers' bargain seemed to have paid off as they won both parliamentary elections in November 2011, and the presidential election of June 2012. In the latter case, supporters of the divided revolutionary candidates who failed to make it through to the second round reluctantly supported the MB candidate Muhammad Morsi against the representative of the *feloul*, Ahmed Shafiq.

Morsi's – narrow and ill-tempered, but nonetheless, democratic – victory opened the final phase of the Egyptian revolution, which was to culminate in the coup of July 2013 and the reversion to military authoritarianism, *pur et dur*. Rebuffed by those revolutionary figures to whom he offered cabinet seats, Morsi appointed as defence minister the man who would come to overthrow him, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood overplayed a worsening hand. A constitutional referendum in December 2012, assuring the presidency greater legal powers than those enjoyed by Mubarak, confirmed the division in the 'negative revolutionary coalition' as proand anti-MB protestors clashed at the Presidential Palace, with allegations of MB militias torturing their opponents. The strike waves continued. An opposition 'National Salvation Front', comprising not just the Leftists, Nasserists and liberals of 2011 but also old regime figures such as "Amr Moussa, was formed to oppose the constitution.

The opposition to Morsi increasingly drew together those who thought the revolution ought to continue – whose demands he would not meet – with those who thought it ought to be reversed – whom he did nothing to disable. This was the terrain on which an alliance between counterrevolution from above and below, drawing in part of the rhetoric, practice and support of the previous revolutionary coalition, was built. Its main, though far from sole, instrument was 'Tamarrod' – 'rebellion' – a petition to remove Morsi that led to a sizeable demonstration on the 30th of June 2013. Proclaiming obeisance to the popular will, SCAF again seized power on the 3rd of July, installing El-Sisi as effective (and later de jure) ruler of the country despite the nominal presidency of Adly Mansour, supported by an appointed cabinet headed by the economist Hazem Beblawi.

The coup against Morsi, and the initial violence directed against the Muslim Brotherhood, was followed by a more thoroughgoing policy of counter-revolution to close the revolutionary situation. In opposition to the coup, the MB and their supporters organised a sit-in in the months of July and August 2013 at Rab'a al-Adawiya square in Cairo. Marking the beginning of the repression to come, the renewed military regime under Sisi dispersed this camp with extreme violence on the 14th of August. Human rights organisations documented approximately almost 1,000 deaths among the protestors.38 The MB itself was outlawed, and its leadership – including former president Morsi – arrested or exiled. A crackdown in universities in September 2013 followed; the leadership of the 'April 6' movement and other (non-Islamist) revolutionaries rounded up at the end of that year; Sisi was installed as president in an election extended for an extra day because of low turnout in May 2014.39 The regime relied upon a mixture of direct

violence, claiming some 754 victims in 2016, juridical repression and incarceration to erase the legacy of the 25th January revolution.40

The intent and the effect of this counter-revolutionary policy were to decapitate and disorient the revolutionary movement, to remove it from the streets and leave its presence only in bitter memory: to end the revolutionary situation and eradicate the hopes it had aroused. 'Trauma' in arrest, torture and exile formed the means of this affective as well as political counter-revolution, attacking the sense of an expanded revolutionary self-infused with collective solidarity.41

Gendered and sexual violence played a part also in this counterrevolutionary trauma. Many of the increasing instances of harassment and assault on the streets and demonstrations could be ascribed to *baltageya*. Amongst the perpetrators, however, were other male demonstrators. The effect of such assaults was counter-revolutionary in nature, allowing existing gender hierarchies deeply embedded *among* the revolutionaries to disrupt and diminish the active revolutionary subject. The less secure women felt in the squares and protests – and the more male protestors and opposition leaders implied, on 'pragmatic' or Islamist grounds that women's presence rather than male violence was the problem – the smaller the demonstrations would become. Most of all, the previous sense of revolutionary space as one of pre-figurative liberation was undone. Assault and harassment, in pushing women out of street politics, served 'to mark the end of the "revolutionary process" (and, with it, the demands for social justice and accountability for past regime crimes) and the return to "normalcy," including normative gender relations'.42

Small wonder then that the SCAF made use of such pre-existing gender norms to exclude and expel – metaphorically or physically – revolutionaries from the Egyptian polity. SCAF's methods included carrying out forced 'virginity tests' on female protestors and averring, in the words of Major Adel Emara, that female protestors were 'not [daughters] like yours or mine'. Such attacks in state media extended even to the 'blue bra girl', the female protestor depicted in a widely circulated video being dragged senseless, kicked and beaten by riot police, exposing her underwear.43 The utility of sexual violence to counter-revolution was not limited to its impact on women, however. As Paul Amar demonstrates, the image of the unruly and overly (or insufficiently) masculine demonstrator – castigated as thuggish *baltageya* or effeminate 'fags'– served also to excise working-class male revolutionaries from the national community. Posing the revolutionary subject as a sexually disturbing one, whether as perpetrator or victim of assault, SCAF presented itself as the guardian of Egypt's honour.44

Such forms of state coercion did not abate, despite two presidential electoral victories of questionable legitimacy in 2014 and 2018. The Sisi regime continued to rely on exemplary repression without any policies to address the popular discontent that sparked the initial uprising.45 Protests and strikes, most often around economic demands, continued, but the Egyptian counter-revolution of exemplary violence and incarceration – as a specific policy directed against the gains of the 25th January Revolution – did produce an effect.

Where 2011–13 had seen the partial muzzling of the security apparatus and the effective winning of freedoms of speech, assembly and political contestation, the Sisi regime codified and made permanent the repressive ordinances of Mubarak's 'state of emergency'. The 'Protest Law' (law 107/2013) outlawed protests except with the express permission of the police or interior ministry and, reflecting the importance of mosques as revolutionary assembly points, banned 'any political gathering in houses of worship'.46 This ordinance was later augmented by the 'anti-terrorism law' (law 65/2015), issued directly by Sisi in a presidential decree, and rendering a capacious range of activities punishable by ten years' hard labour.47 Between the coup of July 2013 and the passing of the protest law in November of that year, Egypt witnessed the highest daily level of protests since 2011, 107.5 per day: after the passing of the law, this number decreased by 52 per cent.48 By 2017, the rate of protest had decreased tenfold to roughly four incidents per day.49

The re-imposition of a state of emergency in that year brought an even wider dragnet of repression.50 Whereas strike waves had played a central role in the end of Mubarak, by 2017, a major strike in the labour movement stronghold of Mahalla el-Kubra saw workers' leaders rounded up on 'security and anti-terrorism grounds'.51 The net result of this repression was the physical removal of politically active Egyptians from the streets. In 2011, Egypt had 43 prisons: in 2016, 62 – with only three of the increase having been built before the 2013 coup. In 2011, Egypt held 60,000 inmates: by 2016, 106,000 approximately 60,000 of whom were political prisoners.52 One Cairene citizen, on the occasion of a rise in metro fares that sparked (swiftly repressed) protests, summed up the situation thus: '[e]ither go to jail or starve to death, either of which will be very soon'.53 By the time of his second election victory, then, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's counter-revolutionary regime may not have been stable but was at least partially successful. The threat of elected politicians exerting any control over the Egyptian state and the military at its core, still less profound social transformation, had been thwarted. The rights of free assembly, speech and the withdrawal of labour that Egyptians won in practice in 2011–13 were again eliminated. The *feloul* were assured control of their factories and investments, their managers no longer at risk of being 'cleansed'. A sizeable proportion of the mass of protestors, who had created the pre-figurative experience described above as the 'republic of Tahrir', were incarcerated, exiled, or killed. In short, the breach opened by the revolutionary situation of 2011–13 had been closed.

Counter-Revolution from Below

Counter-revolutions require not just policies of repression but counterrevolutionaries to support and carry them out. As discussed in Chapter 2, counter-revolution is never an affair purely managed from above but reaches down to build a political subject of its own, one that can put an end to the breach in social and political order that characterises the revolutionary situation. The means of doing so, and their success, depend upon the particular historical context of the revolution and on the actions of both revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries. All revolutionary situations consist of

moments of deep uncertainty: breaches in the normal order so profound that the simply counter-revolutionary call to restore (or rather remake) that order is likely to find a ready-made constituency. The discursive and physical expulsion of revolutionaries from the national community, and hence the outsized place given to international conspiracy and foreign hands in counter-revolutionary narratives, is also shared across historical experience.

In past revolutionary waves, the persistence, or only recent disappearance, of agrarian social structures characterised by personal domination offered both counter-revolutionary personnel and the ideological magnetism to attract anti-revolutionary mass support. The Arab republics had already undergone revolutions from above that had done away with such structures. The counter-revolutions against 2011, therefore, relied not on reactions *against* notions of modernity and development but *defences* of them. Such defence was based on real and imagined memories of those revolutions from above, combined with the limited and class-bound prosperity of the infitah years, all diffused through old and new media. For this reason, rather than any revolutionary status in their own right, Islamist competitors served as useful centripetal force – allowing old regime counter-revolutionaries to claim, however implausibly, that they represented the only means of defending advances in the rights of women or religious minorities. Such formed the broad lineaments of the counter-revolutionary subjects in Tunisia and Egypt: how, then, were such subjects built in each case?

Tunisia

Unable to draw upon either the resources of a landed aristocracy or strongly allied military, Tunisia's *azlam* faced a dual challenge: to coopt or degrade, on the one hand, their political challengers in Ennahda and, on the other, the social challenge posed by the continuing revolutionary protests. The distinction between the wealthier coastal Sahel and the interior, and the associated cultural distinction between laic Tunisian modernism and Islamism, proved crucial to doing so. Tunisia, therefore, shared with Egypt the tripartite conflict between counter-revolutionaries of the old regime, Islamists seeking a political but not social revolution, and continuing protests in which organised labour played a central role. In Tunisia, however, the first were less embedded in the military and the third much more nationally organised than in Egypt – producing the eventual outcome of a Bourguibist-Islamist condominium at the expense of the social demands of the revolution.

This tripartite contest played out both in the newly established elected institutions and in the streets. In the latter, voting patterns in the 2014 parliamentary and presidential elections and the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) elections of 2011 revealed the inheritance of Ben Ali and Bourguiba's skewed developmentalism in the division between Sahel and interior. Ennahda did much better in the earlier poll – reflecting both the absence of either a unified challenger or a record in office. In 2014, the further south the district and the further inland the district, the better the Ennahda (or non-Nidaa Tounes vote) vote: in the highest-scoring Nidaa Tounes district (Ben Ali's hometown), Monastir, the party gained 56.8 per cent and Ennahda less than half that,

20.6 per cent: Ennahda's resounding 65.4 per cent in the southernmost province of Tataouine compared with a feeble showing of 7.7 per cent for Nidaa Tounes. In only eight districts out of 27, largely urban constituencies in Sfax and Tunis, were the two parties within 10 per cent of each other – the geographic division was clear.54

The 2014 parliamentary results showed little correlation, however, between the Nida Tounes vote and level of education, typically – if not always justifiably – used as a proxy for social class. Amongst the population of Monastir, displaying the highest Nidaa Tounes vote share at

56.84 per cent, some 13.92 per cent hold a university degree: in Tatouine, Nidaa Tounes' lowest voting district where only 7.7 per cent of the electorate favoured the party, 8.15 per cent of the population were graduates. Even in districts with extremely low higher education rates – under 5 per cent – such as Siliana or Sidi Bouzid, Nidaa Tounes garnered above 25 per cent of the vote. Any correlation between the proportion of degree-holders in the population and support for the party of the *azlam* was at best weak.

A stronger relationship held between unemployment and opposition to

Nidaa Tounes, suggesting an appeal based on the beneficiaries of Ben Ali's neoliberal growth model. No district in which the party gained more than 40 per cent of the vote had higher than 10 per cent unemployment: nonetheless, districts with one quarter or more of the population unemployed could still give a similar proportion of their vote to Nida Tounes. All three of the districts where Ennahda gained more than 40 per cent of the vote also suffered from unemployment rates higher than 20 per cent, a pattern mirrored by the – extremely high – rates of graduate unemployment.55 A clearer pattern could be observed in the presidential election run-off, with the choice reduced to two candidates, Essebsi and the (non-Islamist) Moncef Marzouki. With the exception of Sidi Bouzid, which supported Nida Tounes in both parliamentary and presidential elections, districts with higher than 20 per cent unemployment chose Marzouki: those (few) with an unemployment rate under 10 per cent voted for Essebsi by a large margin.56

Such were the outlines of Tunisian counter-revolution visible in the electoral statistics. Street protests – and by no means all anti-Ennahda protests were pro-Nida Tounes – and newly-emancipated public discourse reveal a complementary picture. Although the party formed a co-ordinating network for wealthy former *RCDistes* seeking to protect their wealth, its appeal and especially its opposition to Ennahda was not limited to these *azlam.* The afterlife of Bourguiba's revolution from above and the cultural and economic geographies it had established or reinforced was vital to attract counter-revolutionaries from below: this was the true meaning of the battle over Tunisian secularism. To this inheritance could be added the very material interest of many small businessmen and the informally employed in restoring the order on which the tourist trade depended. The declining economic situation of the revolutionary period contrasted with the (uneven but real) growth under Ben Ali: for those outside a collec-

tive organisation such as the UGTT, the pull of authoritarian stability to guarantee individual enterprise was strong.57

The origins of that appeal were to be found in the inheritance of Bourguiba's post-independence state-building revolution from above. Tunisia occupied a heteroclite position amongst the Arab anti-colonial movements of the mid-20th century: nationalist but not noticeably panArab, *dirigiste* but firmly anti-communist, modernist in its aspiration to liberal equality between men and women and the subordination of mosque to state but conservative in its preservation of a class distinction maintained by Francophone culture. No equivalent could be found south of the Anatolian peninsula.

Bourguiba's brand of reformist nationalism, having triumphed over the Arab-Islamic tendency championed by Salah Ben Youssef, also represented victory for the politics of petty farmers of the Sahel, the coastal littoral outside of Tunis.58 European agricultural colonisation, with its concomitant exercise of labour-repressive power over the indigenous population, was concentrated in the zones further to the South and East. The majority of the roughly quarter of a million *colons* fled in the first three years after independence: enabling the Bourguiba to redistribute their lands without infringing on the sanctity of private property.59 These policies created a lasting economic geography, which would be crucial to the unfolding of the crisis of 2011–2013. The northern and coastal areas received the lion's share of investment, infrastructure and growth, with even the resources extracted from the phosphate mines and date plantations of the interior finding their way to be processed in profitable concerns in the Sahel.60

Alongside this geographical division, Bourguiba's revolution from above exacerbated a cultural one. Tunisian secularism sought not to eliminate religious life as such but to extinguish the potential obstacles posed by institutional alternatives to state-led industrialisation – especially given the extent of the *habous* land-holdings (the same institutions known as *waqf/awqaf* in the Eastern Arab world) controlled by religious foundations.61 Bourguiba confiscated and redistributed these lands, appointed a pliant cleric as the head of Zitouna – the training college of the Tunisian imamate – reorganised the shari'a courts and appointed favourable clients to them. A new personal status code extended the model of the nuclear family – basis of the social reproduction of the wage economy – gave women the right of assent in an arranged marriage, established ages of majority and equalised the right of divorce. These initiatives produced a genuine social change, in the form of mass education for women (and indeed for the nearly 70 per cent of boys not enrolled in primary school at independence) although school attendance was not mandatory until 1991.62 Bourguibism and its associated *laicite* established a material basis through the dispossession of both the ulema and the French, and the building of a national education system and labour market.

Such an inheritance provided fertile ground for the rehabilitation of the *haybat al-dawla* and *Tunisianité*, in which both Ennahda and Nida Tounes, with their respective media and social penumbra, participated. The 'dignity of the state' (implying the indignity of the revolution, at least as a continuing phenomenon) was accepted by both, leaving the competing definitions of *Tunisianité* the terrain of contest.63 This contest

drew upon the twofold unevenness that had underpinned the Neo-Destourian revolution from above: that between Tunisia and the colonising West, in which the former was considered not a challenger to but an improving pupil of the latter and that within Tunisia itself wherein the Sahel was the site and beneficiary of outward-oriented development and the interior merely its resource base. The concomitant cultural oppositions – tradition-modernity, secular-Islamist, developed-backward – infused debate over the meaning and direction of the revolution. In a particularly striking instance, the Nida Tounes presidential candidate Beji Caid Essebsi in 2014 referred to his opponent Moncef Marzouki (a consistent left-liberal) as the 'candidate of the jihadists', echoing his 2011 remarks on the 'civilized littoral' of the coast.64

The making of the new constitution, to be drafted by the National Constituent Assembly, served as the chief battleground for the contest between these trends. The articles of the constitutional draft dealing with the status of Islam and with gender equality formed the focal points of the debate. As to the former, the first article of the draft defined Tunisia as a 'free, independent, sovereign state' and that 'Islam is its religion, Arabic its language and the republic its system'. The exact implications of the possessive pronoun – which 'it', the people or the state? – were left textually unresolved, but article 6 subsequently 'committed to preventing' the declarations of *takfir* mounted by some Islamists against their opponents and to 'guarantee freedom of belief and conscience and religious practices'.65

The image of Tunisian womanhood as 'professional, modern and emancipated' formed a key plank of *Tunisianité* : the debates around the draft articles on the status of women, thus, refracted the entire struggle between the inheritors of the Bourguibist regime and its Islamist would-be replacements.66 The association of Bourguiba's personal status code and later legal reforms with the old regime served as a potential transmission link between the supporters of that regime and a potential wider constituency. Fear of Ennahda repealing or undermining the code reflected the view, expressed by the former director of the quasigovernmental *Centre de Recherche, d'etudes de Documentation et d'information sur La Femme*: '[under Ben Ali], the state was in charge of the Woman Question, it's true that we had a so-called feminist state. But now [since the victory of Ennahda] the state is almost against women's rights'.67 Over one million women voted for Essebsi in the 2014 presidential election.68

Of course, such a view was not necessarily shared by all Tunisian women nor were all of its proponents supporters of the old regime. The uprising, as we have seen, was characterised by the widespread participation of women 'who found themselves mobilising politically, involving themselves in civil society and encouraging others to vote in a spontaneous movement throughout the country'.69 Moreover, Ennahda's initial plans for the constitution did include a constitutional draft article (number 28) describing women as 'fundamental partners to men in nation-building, with their roles complementing one another in the family'. Following widespread mobilisation by feminists and the women's commission of the UGTT, the clause was withdrawn and replaced by one focused on equality rather than complementarity.70 In power, however,

Nidaa Tounes proved scarcely more amenable to the advancement of women even in the ruling elite than Ennahda. The first Nidaa Tounes cabinet featured only three females out of twenty-four total ministers, none in powerful roles.71

The Islamist-Bourguibist contest expressed in such debates in the new political institutions, and reflecting the uneven legacy of national developmentalism, interacted with the social struggles of the revolution. In particular, the UGTT played a dual role and one that blunted the thrust of political counter-revolution. Ben Ali used the threat of Islamism, and the commitment of the Left in the UGTT to combatting it over confronting his regime, to assure the union's quiescence in the two decades before the revolution. Ben Ali's candidate for leadership of the union in 1989, the corrupt and authoritarian Ismail Sahbani, was supported by the Left as a bulwark against Islamists: upon his victory, Sahbani naturally did not reward this support but rather stocked the leadership and regional committees with regime loyalists, including *RCDistes*.72 The UGTT leadership participated in tripartite co-operation with the regime and the employers' federation UTICA, laying the groundwork for the cross-class 'quartet' that would emerge to pressure Ennahda from government in 2013. Yet the UGTT could only be a useful, if subordinate partner, provided it maintained genuine roots amongst workers, allowing the limited space for independent organisation that would prove so vital to the 2011 revolution. As the impact of the neoliberal turn spread and deepened, the UGTT became both a site and target for mobilisation against these policies and therefore the regime itself.

The UGTT leadership, then, had been part of the circle of influence of the old regime, but at the same time it served as the one national organisation through which workers could pursue democratic collective action. The tripartite struggle – the *azlam* and Nidaa Tounes versus Ennahda versus the UGTT – reflected the separation of the political and social aspects of the revolution. Nidaa Tounes sought to exclude Ennahda and preserve their wealth and privileges through political means and the system under which they had been gained: Ennahda proved agnostic about the preservation of wealth and privilege but sought power to change the laic system. The UGTT oscillated between these two – the former allegiance of its leading officers to Ben Ali and the consistent hostility of the Islamists to trade unionism, however, providing a strong pole of attraction towards the *azlam*. During the Troika, the UGTT functioned as an extra-parliamentary opposition to the Ennahda-led administration: as mentioned earlier, the 'Leagues for the Protection of the Revolution', which the UGTT considered an Islamist front, mounted attacks on the union and its supporters.73 It was the industrial muscle of the UGTT, in co-operation with the employers' federation, that put an end to the Ennahda government and installed the technocratic administration of Mehdi Joma'a.

The UGTT, precisely because of its nature as a functioning trade union, however, cannot be considered a simple analogue of the old regime forces of the Egyptian military. The opposition to Ennahda was not solely limited to or controlled by the *azlam*: Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi, the men whose assassinations provoked the largest mobilisations against the Troika, hailed from the Arab nationalist Left. Nei-

ther had failed to oppose the Ben Ali regime. Protests in districts such as Sidi Bouzid, which had voted strongly against Ennahda, continued and even intensified under both the technocratic administration and the Ennahda–Nidaa Tounes coalition that replaced it.

Herein lies the difference between a military coup ordered from the top of a chain of command and a general strike that requires the actual participation of trade union members to succeed. The former can be given as an order through a hierarchy, emanating from the desire to protect the interests of a central strategic core. The Egyptian army high command formed an outcrop of a wider ruling class, strongly linked to the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) and facing a rival Islamist faction whose representatives had been democratically elected. Ennahda was likewise democratically elected (in coalition with the other parts of the Troika), but its enemies in the UGTT, even if the union bureaucracy was well-stocked with *azlam*, relied upon a mass membership whom they needed to persuade rather than command. The offer of a full-blown return to Ben Alism without Ben Ali, along the lines of the Egyptian coup, was not a persuasive one despite the continuing afterlives of Bourguiba's modernising revolution from above. Therefore, although elements of the opposition called for the dissolution of the National Constituent Assembly in 2013, the UGTT demanded only the end of the Troika. This implied a change of personnel, not the overthrow of the democratic institutions won by the revolution.74 The compromise that preserved those institutions was based on the objective, shared by both Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes, of restoring the *haibat al-dawla*: a 'centralising notion representing order, stable institutions and a prestigious state' that 'disregards social matters as something that should be "managed."'75 Political revolution was preserved at the cost of social counter-revolution. Although the *haibat al-dawla* was equally important, both the means, and the outcome, of the counter-revolution in Egypt were quite different.

Egypt

If Tunisia witnessed a political revolution that left the social demands of the uprising unmet but was nonetheless hedged around by the strongest organisation propagating those demands, why did events take a different turn in Cairo? The Egyptian counter-revolution was so successful because it united three elements: a strategic core of the old regime ensconced in the military; a popular base united on one side with that strategic core through prestige of the army and its inheritance of the Nasserist revolution from above and alienated from the political victors of the revolution, the Muslim Brotherhood; and the investment of competing counter-revolutionary powers, one group of which backed Sisi's counter-revolutionary coup to the hilt. Counter-revolution is built partly by portraying revolution as an external threat that could be countered only by the organic unity of an imagined past. In the case of Egypt, this political inheritance derived from the immediate post-colonial period under Gamal Abdel Nasser, the 'afterlives' or 'ghosts' of which continued to haunt the revolution of the early twenty-first century.76

The traction of this form of politics, uniting an ideology of national dignity with a corporatist view of the nation centred around the military, persisted long after Nasser's death and the adoption of quite different policies: an influence evident in two slogans prevalent in the 2011 revolution, *irfa*" *rasak fou'*, *inta Masrii*, 'raise up your head, you're an Egyptian' and '*al-gaish wa-l-sh'ab yiid wahid*', 'the people and the army are one hand'. The memory of this era served both to condemn the neoliberal regime that followed it and to offer an alternative model. The Nasserist attachment to the military state – which had achieved the undoing of the colonial-landlord power behind previous forms of counter-revolution, therefore, provided fertile ground for a new version of the phenomenon after 2011.77

The origins of this attachment lay in the 'Free Officers' coup of 1952. This group of nationalist-minded largely junior officers overthrew the rule of a narrow elite of Egyptian notables. Egypt formed the centre of a system of Arab states based on an alliance of landowners and merchants severely circumscribed by the persistence of elements of the colonial state: especially the continued British control of the Suez canal. The country was embedded in social relations that extended beyond its borders, the most important of which was the position of the country in the world market as a cotton exporter. The lot of most Egyptians , often under the threat of extra-economic coercion by landlords, was agricultural labour to feed this demand.78 A growing workers' movement in the first half of the twentieth century nonetheless challenged both colonial rule and local management. In Cairo, a cosmopolitan and often nonEgyptian elite presided over both the wealth of the intermediary trade between the Egyptian countryside and the global market and a swelling mass of the poor and disinherited.

For those excluded from this conclave, the sense of national humiliation was deep and real. The so-called new *effendiyya* of civil servants, salaried and technical employees who, despite acquiring a 'modern education', in particular found their path to professional advancement blocked.79 Army officers formed a particularly acute case of this group: at the time of the Palestine war in 1948, two-thirds of Egyptian army officers were (like Nasser) the sons of salaried officials, and the remaining third the sons of upper or middle peasants yet not a single officer hailed from any of the one hundred largest landowning families.80 In power, the programme of these officers was, therefore, threefold: the final evacuation of the British (and therefore Egyptian control of the Suez Canal); building a strong Egyptian army; agrarian reform to weaken the landowning elite who diverted export revenues away from the investment needed to achieve a modernised military apparatus.81 Under Nasser, this programme became a thoroughgoing revolution from above.82 The basis for Nasser's policy lay in the 'long boom' between 1950 and 1980, and the ability to manoeuvre between the US and Soviet blocs in order to obtain foreign aid.83

On the basis of this international configuration, Nasser embarked on a recomposition of Egyptian class structure that – for a time at least – improved the lot of urban waged employees and the rural middle and upper peasantry, producing the basis for later popular identification with the military.84 Despite the regime's self-

characterisation as 'socialist', Adel Rifaat and Bahgat el-Nadi sum up the Nasserist transformation well: between 1952 and 1967, 'an indigenous bourgeois coalition dominated by the state bourgeoisie' propped up by Soviet wheat imports and export credits.85 Two rounds of land reform, in 1952 and 1961 ended the dominion of the large landowners and redistributed productive land primarily to middle and wealthy peasants.86 The military formed the institutional spine of the state itself, occupying an unavoidable place in the everyday life of the country. Nonetheless, the memory of this era served both to condemn the neoliberal regime that followed it and to offer an alternative model. The Nasserist military state had achieved the undoing of the colonial-landlord power behind previous forms of counter-revolution.87

Nasser's revolution from above was followed by a change of developmental model to *infitah* – a greater reliance on the market and return to pro-Western alignment – under his successor Sadat. Benefitting from *infitah* economics, but outside the political power structure, lay the Islamist bourgeoisie. Excluded from the patronage of the regime, these pious industrialists developed their own commercial networks attracting the support of small businessmen and professionals extending to the Gulf.88 The predominance of Muslim Brotherhood businessmen in mid-level retail led one financier to describe them as 'supermarket owners, not industrialists'.89 To keep the Muslim Brotherhood out, and the rest of society down, Mubarak greatly expanded and multiplied the internal security agencies, accompanied by an increasingly brutal auxiliary corps of *baltageya*.90

As an uprising against this dispensation, popular Nasserist themes were already embedded in the January 25th revolution, even if those reflected hopes that had never been realised.91 National dignity and social justice were common themes expressed in posters, slogans and song.92 Enduring Nasserist influence, particularly on the leadership of the independent workers' union and youth movements, formed the adhesive between the mass movement and SCAF's counter-revolution, winning over part of the revolutionary subject to the cause of counterrevolution. As mentioned earlier, the two organisations central to this project: the National Salvation Front and Tamarrod.

The National Salvation Front was formed in the autumn of 2012 to oppose Morsi's constitutional reforms. More politically heterogeneous than Tamarrod, the NSF did not initially call for the end of Morsi's presidency but only for the rescinding of Morsi's constitutional plans. Its constituent parts were embodied in prominent personalities: Mohammed el-Baradei, former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency and standard-bearer of Egyptian liberalism; Hamdeen Sabahi, the long-standing firebrand of the Nasserist Left and close contender in the first round of the 2012 presidential election; and 'Amr Moussa, former Mubarak foreign minister, identified with the more liberal end of the old regime.93 The NSF also embraced a large part of the Egyptian Left, including the Communist Party and part of the Social Democratic Party. After supporting the coup of July 2013, the NSF itself declined into political incoherence. What had welded these elements together was the shared view, reflecting a common

trope of the Nasserist period, of the Muslim Brotherhood as a conspiratorial foreign entity threatening the Egyptian state.94

Tamarrod was formed after the NSF. Founded in April 2013 primarily by members of the Nasserist current within the 'Kefaya' movement,

Tamarrod made no secret of its support for the Egyptian military nor of its reliance on SCAF to remove Morsi.95 Although proclaiming 'we are against both Morsi and [presidential candidate Ahmed] Shafik',96 Tamarrod attracted both the attention and the membership of police and *Mukhabarat.* Retired state security officers claimed a reciprocal relationship existed between them and the organisation.97 Leaked conversations, purportedly of Sisi himself and his chiefs-of-staff, reveal direct financial support from the Egyptian state and UAE to Tamarrod.98 The eagerness with which Tamarrod sought the protection and aid of the military alienated many activists who shared its opposition to Morsi, but who thought him too close to, rather than too far from, the security apparatus.99 The reaction of that apparatus to the mass demonstrations called by Tamarrod on 30th June 2013 marked a stark contrast with the confrontations and collective violence of the '18 days'. Muslim Brotherhood offices unprotected by the state, rather than police stations, formed the target of attack: some police officers in uniform joined the demonstrations.100

The orientation of Tamarrod's leadership toward SCAF did not preclude the campaign from being genuinely popular. The Egyptian counter-revolution could not have been as successful as it was without such popularity. That popularity drew on the as-yet unfulfilled hopes of the 2011 revolution as well as the persistent imaginary of Nasser's revolution from above. The contrast between the two, when seen as Morsi versus Nasser, could hardly flatter the former: where Nasser and the Free Officers had already abolished the monarchy, expelled most of the British occupiers and instituted land reform within his first hundred days, the equivalent period under Morsi had yielded no such radical progress.101 Tamarrod was, therefore, able, in a contradictory moment, to attract the support of both some of the revolutionaries of 2011 and of members (such as Omar Suleiman) of the regime against which they protested.102 The political parties of the NSF, as well as state and independent trade unions, collected signatures for Tamarrod's petition campaign, while '[a]ll of the major private media conglomerates' offered its leaders airtime – still a far superior communications resource compared to the social media on which the anti-Mubarak and anti-SCAF revolutionaries had relied.103

If such were the organisational and media bases available to Tamarrod, what deeper divisions were mobilised in the forging of an Egyptian counter-revolutionary subject? Egyptians under Morsi, for the most part, became polarised into proand anti-MB camps: non-Ikhwan Salafi Islamists fell into both (the Salafist *Nur* party eventually supporting Sisi's coup), while those revolutionaries who consistently opposed both

Morsi and SCAF remained an isolated minority.104 There were wealthy businessmen who supported SCAF and wealthy businessmen who supported Morsi, impoverished inhabitants of the '*ashawiyat* (informal settlements) who did likewise. Organised

labour in both its statesponsored and newly independent form had never proven fecund territory for the Brotherhood – although this is not to say that workers never supported Morsi nor that the extensive strike waves under his rule were motivated by identification with SCAF.

This contradictory dynamic between, on the one hand, a continuing revolutionary opposition to Morsi and, on the other, an increasingly confident counter-revolution was expressed particularly in struggles around gender and sectarianism. As noted earlier, women's organisations and demands had been frequently annexed by the pre-2011 regime (while achieving little in practice) as a symbolic marker of development, modernity and international respectability. As in Tunisia under Ennahda, Egypt under Morsi, therefore, saw the questions of gender equality become part of the battleground upon which the struggle between revolutionary and counter-revolutionary forces was fought. If a constitutional focus for this contest was lacking, this was because Morsi's 2012 constitution contained no specific article referring to women. Some of the more discriminatory proposed legislation in the People's Assembly and constitutional articles were defeated105 and the constitution guaranteed 'equality and equal opportunities for all citizens, men and women'. Women were posed, reflecting both Nasserist and Islamist traditions, as embodiments of the nation and complements of men: 'partners in all national gains and responsibilities'. The family unit, however, was accorded an article in its own right as 'the basis of the society...founded on religion, morality and patriotism'. This article affirmed the state's commitment to reconcile the responsibilities of women, but not men, to both work and family.106 The 2014 post-coup constitution expanded these articles under the rubric of 'the place of women, motherhood and the family' while introducing an aspiration for 'appropriate representation' in public life: returning to the pre-2011 of annexing women's organisations to the state while maintaining an overall principle of subjugation.

Coptic Christians, comprising around a tenth of the population, were placed in a similar ambiguous relationship to the regime. Subject to increasing bouts of sectarian violence – especially connected to the building of churches and marital conversion, both subject to discriminatory laws – from the 1970s onward, the regime treated Copts as mechanism of its rule.107 The regime posed as the defender of Copts against Islamist attack while simultaneously upholding the discriminatory legal and social order that rendered them a subjugated minority. Anwar Sadat, explaining his interpretation of the second article of the Egyptian constitution, which defines Islam as 'the religion of the state' expressed the view quite clearly: 'I am the Muslim President of an Islamic state who knows his responsibilities', which included preserving Islam as 'the true guarantor of Christianity in Egypt' against 'the demons of sedition (fitna)'.108 Under Mubarak this relationship was strengthened even as Copts faced increased violence and discrimination, incorporating the Church hierarchy in a close relationship with the regime.

The 2011 revolution, in which the Coptic Pope Shenouda discouraged participation, threatened this relationship. Drawing on the heritage of the 1919 revolution against

British rule, the protestors frequently bore the symbol of the Islamic crescent and Christian cross superimposed on one another, while Christians formed human chains to protect their Muslim comrades prostate in prayer. In October 2011, a demonstration proceeded from Shubra – one of central Cairo's poorer areas with a large Coptic population – to the state media headquarters at the Maspero building, protesting the acquiescence of the governor of Aswan in the destruction of a church by Salafists. Although the cause was specific, both the act of (cross-sectarian) demonstration itself and the chants and demands of the protestors – which quickly turned against SCAF – were revolutionary acts. Protesting independently in this way also implied protesting against the Church hierarchy imbricated with the regime: the revolution was also happening inside the Coptic community. The army and police attacked the protest with tear gas, shots and armoured personnel carriers while state broadcasters urged declared, 'Copts are attacking the Egyptian army. Egyptians must take to the streets to defend the army'. More than twenty protestors were killed, including the wellknown activist Mina Daniel.109

While deploying such violence and incitement against Copts, SCAF simultaneously posed as the protector of Christians against the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamists. The Brotherhood's opposition to nonMuslim (or female) candidates for the presidency, the pre-eminence given to Sunni Islamic jurisprudence in the new (2012) constitution and the organisation's competition with openly sectarian Salafi currents for their voter base lent credence to this position.110 Shenouda's successor, Pope Tawadros, supported the coup against Morsi and the subsequent counter-revolutionary regime. This reaffirmation of the close but subordinate relationship between the Church hierarchy and the regime did not ensure the security of Egyptian Christians, however, who were subject to an increasing series of deadly attacks (many claimed by ISIS' affiliate in Sinai) as the decade wore on.

Of course, the base of counter-revolutionary support extended beyond the contradictory use of sect and gender by SCAF and its allies. The tworound system employed in the 2012 presidential election allows at least some geographical conclusions to be drawn about where that support lay. Shafiq's support was not solely urban nor Morsi's solely rural although Shafiq did win most large cities apart from the historical Islamist stronghold of Alexandria. Shafiq won in areas such as Cairo, Port Said, the Red Sea and Luxor (the latter two areas particularly dependent on tourism), while Morsi's strong showing in provincial cities might bear out Armburst's claim that the Brotherhood attracted 'shopkeepers or schoolteachers with relatively high levels of educational attainment for their families, living on the fringes of provincial cities with populations between half a million and two million'.111 The sparsely populated governorates west of the Nile were Morsi territory. Comparison with the first round, however, reveals a finer grain. The Left Nasserist candidate Hamdeen Sabahi garnered 21.6 per cent of the vote, only 2 per cent behind Shafiq (23.74 per cent) and less than 4 per cent behind Morsi (25.3 per cent). Sabahi won in Cairo, Alexandria, the Red Sea, Port Said and Kafr el-Sheikh.112 With the exception of Kafr al-Shaikh (Sabahi's home district) and

Alexandria, all of these turned to Shafiq in the second round. The large number of candidates, including five who won at least one governorate in the first round, renders firm judgments about which votes went to whom in the second round difficult to make. Nonetheless, Sabahi's initial success demonstrates at least the presence of a substantial revolutionary bloc, some of whom at least were then nonetheless prepared to vote for Mubarak's last prime minister.

Sabahi and most other opposition politicians and parties organised in the NSF, lent some degree of support to the coup against Morsi. Tamarrod endorsed the attack on the pro-Morsi sit six weeks later at Raba'a al-Adawiya. In a statement on the attack, the NSF saluted the 'police and military forces' and the 'firm leadership of the armed forces' in implementing 'the collective will of the people'.113 It is important to note that the SCAF counter-revolution was only able to attract a part of the revolutionary coalition to its side (although a part was all that was required.) The April 6th Movement, the Revolutionary Socialists, the Egyptian Current and the Independent Trade Union Federation and cultural and activist groups such as 'Mosireen' and 'Askar Kazeboon' ('the Military are Liars') all opposed the pro-coup mobilisation on the 26th of July 2013.114 The participation of former opposition figures in Tamarrod and the NSF reflected a Nasserist politics focused on the state, and especially the military, as bearer of a project of national development. This patrimony gave Sisi's counter-revolution popular traction: an appeal that the participation of such figures helped to spread wide and deep.115

By these means, the post-coup regime relied upon a wider zone of support, in which Nasserism was the dominant identifiable political colouring. The committee charged with drafting a new constitution assembled a cast of such figures, including the head of the Nasserist party, the head of Karama (Hamdeen Sabahi's neo-Nasserist party) and Mahmoud Badr himself. More significant was the designation of Kamal Abu Eita, leading Left Nasserist and perhaps, as one of the founders of the Egyptian Independent Trade Union Federation, one of the most famous trade unionists in the country, as minister of Labour. Mohamed el-Baradei served as Adly Mansour's Vice President and Ziad Bahaa el-Din of the Egyptian Social Democratic Party as Deputy Prime Minister – Sisi, the real power in the cabinet, served nominally as defence minister.116 Prominent intellectuals of the Nasserist Left and liberal centre alike declared the necessity of closing the national ranks in the fight against the Brotherhood.117 As the Sisi regime became more embedded, the circle of repression widened, and the absence of a revived economic plan became apparent, these figures and organisations were dispensed with.

Likewise, the Sisi regime's relationship with private business was contradictory: defending business interests, for example, by repressing strikes and encouraging workers to press hard on the 'wheel of production', Sisi also sought to tap private capital to fund a promised plan of neo-Nasserist national development.118 Where Nasser's revolution from above had, in fact, confronted private capital and landowners, Sisi pursued no such course. To the extent that this regime differed from the pre2011 dispensation, it reversed the relationship between the military and the repressive apparatus of the

interior ministry, with the former now in a commanding position. This change implied no slackening of internal repression: quite the opposite. The position of the military did allow, however, for an explosion of popular sentiment in support of the regime drawing upon the image of the army as defender of national unity.119

This image was central to the counter-revolution from below, which, as Amy Austin Holmes notes, necessarily 'reached wide and deep into Egyptian society'.120 The material and symbolic inheritance of Nasser's revolution from above underpinned that reach. The infrastructural, educational and cultural backbone of the Egyptian state had been built under Nasser: providing for the only time in Egyptian history a 'historical bloc...ranging from subaltern forces such as labour, the women's movement, nationalists – to elements of the industrial elite and the new public sector elite' and excluding 'the landowning elite and the Muslim

Brotherhood'.121 The prestige the military acquired in this nationbuilding revolution from above gave material meaning to the *haibat al-dawla* and attracted mass support in its conflict with the Brotherhood. Broadcast media, more so than new social networks, organised and amplified this counter-revolutionary sentiment in demotic mode. Particularly representative, but far from unique, were the outbursts of media personality and former NDP MP Taufic 'Ukasha on his private satellite channel *al-Fara'ayn* ('the Pharaohs'). If the 'party of the couch' were sitting down and watching *al-Fara'ayn*, 'Ukasha was well-placed both to express and to mould their anti-revolutionary politics. 'Ukasha himself was alleged to have been one of the organisers of the 'Battle of the Camel' and had promoted the counter-revolutionary demonstration – billed as supporting a 'corrective revolution' in language reminiscent of Anwar Sadat – at 'Abbasiya Square by the Ministry of Defence in December 2011. This demonstration, as reported by Walter Armbrust, consisted of a 'couple of thousand people...members and families of the police...in plain clothes for the event'.122 Modest in size, the demonstration nonetheless provides an instructive example of counterrevolutionary narratives both repeated across the region and familiar from previous instances of counter-revolution: the nation, embodied in the coercive state, as inviolable but threatened entity; the revolution conceivable only therefore as foreign conspiracy; the revolutionary situation as an intolerable breach to be closed shut by exemplary violence against the revolutionaries, considered beyond the bounds of the nation.

All these tropes were nonetheless expressed in mimetic form of the revolutionary chant or demonstration.

Thus, the demonstration itself was named a 'Friday' like the revolutionary demonstrations at Tahrir – but the 'Friday of the Crossing' (of Israel lines in the 1973 October war). Rhetoric 'thundered against the United States, Israel, Europe and Iran', said to be conspiring against Egypt. The revolutionary site of Tahrir, and hence the breach in social order it represented, appeared as an offence against the nation and even humanity itself. Demonstrators were overheard saying, 'those people in Tahrir square aren't even human beings' while signs proclaimed: 'There are still Egyptians who haven't gone into the [public] squares. Beware the return of the Egyptians. Egypt and the

Egyptians are bigger than [foreign] agendas and funding'; 'We demand the emptying of Tahrir Square immediately'; 'The People and the Police and Army are one hand'; 'the people want death [*i'dam*] for traitors and agents' accompanied by mocked-up pictures of pro-revolution media figures being hanged.123

After the 2013 coup similar, if less bloodthirsty, themes appeared in an effusion of Sisiana. Cakes were baked in the likeness of the field marshal and the song *Tislam al-Ayadi* explicitly invoking the spirit of the 1973 war to praise Sisi and the military became ubiquitous in cafes and public spaces across the country.124

These were all themes and even slogans promoted over *Al-Far'ayn*, which senior military officers allegedly encouraged the lower ranks to watch as 'impartial, objective, and putting the interests of the nation above all other interests'.125 Like his Anglophone or Lusophone counter-parts, 'Ukasha's opponents found both the style and content of his addresses preposterous – but such condescension only endeared him further to his audience. The expansion of that audience in the run-up to the 2013 coup indexed the presence of a counter-revolutionary base. The substance of such appeals – which did not rely upon a specifically Nasserist inflection unlike the temporary alliance of the NSF with SCAF – lay in identification with the army and the coercive state as the embodiment of order and the revolutionary situation as an intolerable affront to that order. Before the Abbasiyya demonstration, 'Ukasha intoned that

THE GREAT...[his raised hand and his voice shake together]EGYPTIAN ARMY! Is being insulted! It's being insulted in satellite channels. First they say that the Military Council is one thing, and the army another. In the second stage, it's the whole Egyptian army. And they've pounded on the police forces, accusing them of vandalism [*kharaba*] and thuggery [*baltaga*] and lack of security spreading throughout the country. They say, "It's not enough; we have to finish off the army." The main thing is the army, because then there won't be any protection. A state without an army and without police and without a judicial authority and institutions is no state. Those leftist and communist effendis who don't believe in the existence of the divine being [*bi wugud al zaat al ilahiyya*] are telling you "we want to burn it."126

'Ukasha here denouncing the 'leftist and communist effendis [i.e. intermediary middle class figures]' despite the small numbers and organisational weakness of the Left in the Egyptian revolution, demonstrates the continuity of Egyptian counter-revolutionary speech with its twentiethcentury forbears: the statement would not be out of place in the publications of the German *Freikorps* of 1919–1920.127 Yet where such previous counter-revolutionaries could count upon the inheritance of agrarian class domination, 'Ukasha and his less excitable counter-parts looked back to a more recent past, of Nasser's developmentalist project and Sadat's advance against Israeli lines in 1973. Combined with the attempted mobilisation of class feeling against the ill-defined 'effendi' is the affront given not only by disbelief in the *haibat al-dawla* but its implied connection to the order of the universe: the leftist-communist effendis 'don't believe in the existence of the divine being'.

118

'Ukashsa's addresses, thus, present a melange of counterrevolutionary themes, and were, of course, only the output of one man's satellite station. They nonetheless offer a representative example of the means by which a heterogenous counter-revolutionary subject was made. The military served as both moving force and object of devotion – the Muslim Brotherhood as object of repulsion, bringing together some of the revolutionaries of 2011 with those who had wished them dead. The Brotherhood's positioning of itself in power as the party of order in the face of continuing revolutionary protest provided some of the motivation for this alliance. The heritage of a previous revolution, the Nasserist revolution from above and the associated worldview of the Brotherhood as an external subversive force, provided an even stronger adhesive. Once SCAF and Sisi had seen off the Brotherhood, the temporary allies were soon dispensed with, and the narrow and repressive defence of the *haibat al-dawla* became the order of the day. Central to this counter-revolution, as both part of its structuring narrative and provider of material support, was the international. What was the role of counter-revolution from without in Tunisia and Egypt?

Counter-Revolution from Without

Counter-revolution, as we have seen, is both a 'domestic' and 'international' phenomenon: indeed, both revolution and counter-revolution unsettle the distinction between the two. Revolutionary situations form breaches in the international as much as the domestic order. Situations of fractured sovereignty tend to invite external intervention, while the alliances that form around such intervention transcend state boundaries: they unite disparate levels of states, parties, militias and mass movements on the basis of revolutionary or counter-revolutionary allegiance. Counter-revolution, as Halliday writes, 'is international above all because, like revolution, counter-revolution is both product and further stimulant of a generalised crisis of the state system that engulfs a number of countries'.128

In such moments of crisis, counter-revolutionaries tend to affirm the inviolable sovereignty of the nation just as it is at its most violated. The rhetorical, and physical, expulsion of revolutionaries beyond the bounds of the national community (as conspirators, agents of the *taraf thalit* and so forth) reflects this attempt to restore the imagined unity of the prerevolutionary state. Yet in doing so, counter-revolutionaries must rely on external allies (precisely because the national unity they invoke is imaginary). These allies offer a range of means of support; from diplomatic and financial aid and its inverse, the blockade of revolutionary forces; through the mobilisation of armed proxies; up to an including direct military action. From the point of view of the external counter-revolutionaries, revolutions represent a threat to the social and political systems they still maintain, even where revolutions arise from attempts to 'catch up' with competitor states. The anti-colonial revolutions of the middle twentieth century, with their challenge to imperialism as a system of competitive hierarchy, redoubled this sense of threat.

Tunisia and Egypt offer instructive examples of how international counter-revolution had changed from this model by the early twentyfirst century. The

revolutions of the last quarter of the twentieth century appeared, in their outcomes at least, as liberal revolutions aspiring to join – and welcomed by – a liberal world order. The Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, like the other Arab revolutions, were initially viewed as late-coming instances of such revolutions. Yet in both cases, the heritage of previous revolutions from above – inspired by notions of modernity, development and international catch-up – were central to counter-revolutionary movements. So too were the exertions of Western powers (the USA and the EU in particular) and international financial institutions, as well as regional circuits of capital already incorporated into the pre-2011 regimes. The international counter-revolutionaries were divided, however, between those who promoted political revolution as a means to restore social order and those who sought to reverse both. How did these contrasting dynamics unfold?

Tunisia

Pre-2011Tunisia, like the other states of the region, remained subordinate members of a competitive hierarchy of states: of imperialism, in other words. The country belonged to a system of continuing French influence – appending it to the EU through the tendrils Paris extended to all of its former colonies on the African continent – distinct from the US sphere of influence running (not unimpeded) from Cairo to Abu Dhabi. Although declining after the turn of the century, the proportion of Tunisia's exports bound for the EU remained usually between 70 per cent and 80 per cent and of imports between 50 per cent and 60 per cent.129 The ruling class of the old regime were closely integrated with France (and hence with the EU) economically, diplomatically and culturally; the neoliberal years under Ben Ali had also attracted, as elsewhere, a large element of Gulf capital increasingly incorporated into the regime networks; outside of both circuits, the Islamist fraction of the bourgeoisie looked to Turkey and Qatar as a model.

Before 2011, the European Union adopted the same kind of twofold policy towards Tunisia as that pursued by the United States with Egypt: combining 'democracy promotion' with substantial material support for the incumbent regime. By implicit comparison with the United States, the EU saw its policies toward the 'Southern Neighbourhood' across the Mediterranean as exemplifying its 'normative' power. This power would, as the EU presented it, 'foster both inclusive and mutually advantageous economic growth and political stabilisation converging towards democracy' in states such as Tunisia.130 In practice, however, EU (and French) policy came down on the side of supporting what appeared to be a stable authoritarian regime.131

When the revolution began, the initial French response was to side with the regime. The French foreign minister, Michelle Aillot Marie, who offered assistance to the Tunisian police the day before Ben Ali's departure, had just spent her winter break as a guest of the CEO of Tunisair, a close ally of the dictator.132 Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, Tunisia remained the largest recipient of French aid per capita, reflecting the approval of the Quai D'Orsay for Ben Ali's muscular stance on economic policy, migration and the Islamist opposition: the final communique of the French ambassador to Tunis on the last night of the old regime expressed the hope that Ben Ali

would 'reassert control of the situation' lest it be 'exploited by Islamist movements and extremists'.133

After 2011, the EU shifted its position to 'reward' Tunisia with increased aid via both EU and member states' contributions and not including easier loan conditions from the European Investment Bank: from $359.7 million in 2010 to a peak of $770 million in 2012.134 Accompanying this increase, however, was a policy perspective that divorced economic and social from civil and political rights. Although the social and economic rights might be honoured in the preambles to European policy documents, in the substance, they were demoted to development outcome rather than components of democracy – at odds with the conceptions prevalent amongst Tunisian revolutionaries.135 The EU, thus, formed part of the contest between social and political revolution in Tunisia, promoting the latter as a form of forestalling the former. In this endeavour, the bloc was joined by the International Financial Institutions of the World Bank and the IMF. In 2011, the WB, together with French Development Agency, the EU and the African Development Bank, assembled a $1.3 billion loan package supplemented in June 2013 by a $1.74 billion IMF 'stand-by arrangement'.136 Both of these packages came with familiar structural adjustment conditions: the promotion of private-public partnerships, wage freezes and subsidy cuts, and

'labour market deregulation'. The attempted imposition of these measures first under Ennahda and then under the 'technocratic' government of Mehdi Joma'a – welcomed by the donors – displayed the IFIs' credentials as a counter-revolutionary force. These institutions were, according to a UGTT representative, 'dictating economic policy' and thereby failing to meet the revolutionary demand for 'social justice, freedom or jobs'.137

Where the EU and IFIs acted on the Tunisian revolution as an external constraint, Gulf capital had begun increasing its influence within the country before the uprising. As in Egypt, the counter-revolutionary stance adopted by the GCC reflected both aspirations to regional hegemony and the defence of actually existing investments under threat from social and political disorder. In the two years preceding the outbreak of the revolution (2008–2010), Gulf countries provided the top four sources of foreign investment in Tunisia, amounting to 60.5 per cent of the total.138 Nonetheless, the degree of Gulf integration lagged behind that of Egypt, for example, in agribusiness, which continued largely to 'be owned by wealthy Tunisian families who built their businesses through the patronage and support of the Ben Ali regime'.139 Moreover, it was Qatar rather than Saudi Arabia or the UAE that provided the bulk of Gulf FDI to Tunisia in 2008–10. In fact, Qatari investment outweighed the next three most significant (from Bahrain, the UAE and Kuwait) combined.140

This different profile of integration into regional structures of capital provided a further distinction between Tunisia and Egypt. The UAE and Saudi Arabia never extended the degree of support to the Tunisian *Azlam* as that enjoyed by SCAF and its successors. Ben Ali had been close to the UAE and, of course, fled in exile to Saudi Arabia, but his successors did not enjoy the same relationship. Where the Sisi counter-

revolution completely excluded and expunged the Muslim Brotherhood, the 'Quartet' settlement reached in Tunisia retained Ennahda as a subordinate partner – anathema to the hard-line counter-revolutionaries in Abu Dhabi. The Emirati ambassador to Tunis was even recalled in 2013. Nidaa Tounes' unwillingness to risk the complete exclusion of Ennahda or to participate in the UAE's project of installing Field Marshal Haftar in power in Libya precluded the kind of Emirati patronage that was forthcoming in Egypt. 141

Qatar, by contrast, maintained its influence under Ennahda, Mehdi Joma'a's 'technocratic' administration and the subsequent Nida' Tounes government. In power, Ennahda made efforts to turn towards both the United States and to Doha, in concert with their ideological cognates elsewhere in the region.142 Some success was also achieved with the sale of bonds to Qatar. In 2016, the Qataris covered the cost of a regional economic conference in Tunis: Sheikh al-Thani proffering a $1.25 billion package of aid and investment as the centrepiece of the meeting. This commitment followed on from the ten agreements signed between Qatar and the Ennahda-led Troika in 2012, including military co-operation and materiel.143

Tunisia, thus, experienced a lesser degree of external counterrevolutionary intervention than the other uprisings, and such intervention was pursued in mainly financial and diplomatic form and tended in one direction: to support political revolution as means of managing social struggle. The competition between external counterrevolutionaries, so destructive in other cases, was much lessened in Tunisia, where Qatar was already the pre-eminent investor before 2011. This is not to say that either Qatar or extra-regional powers and institutions such as the EU played a benign role. Rather, the external counter-revolution interacted with the dynamic of stalemate between political revolution and continuing social struggle. In part, this again may be ascribed to the strength of the UGTT as an independent workers' organisation resistant to external influence: a strength that further frustrated the attempts to impose IFI-recommended austerity on a recalcitrant populace.144

Egypt

The Egyptian counter-revolution would not have succeeded without direct financial and security intervention emerging from the Gulf states and the United States, which had been incorporated into the Egyptian ruling class in the post-Nasser period. This regional and global counterrevolutionary alliance funded, and shielded from diplomatic pressure, the counter-revolutionary regime.

The states making the intervention, thus, comprised the strongest allies of Mubarak's *ancien regime*: the United States and the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries, most of all Qatar, the UAE, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. However, these states were neither united in their approach, nor were their short-term policies towards the Egyptian revolution divorced from the longer-term effects of the neoliberal era. The policies of that era had brought a close integration between the ruling strata of the Gulf states and Egypt, embodied in shared economic interests, secured by military co-operation with the United States. The Egyptian revolution split this

conclave over the necessary strategy in response: the UAE, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia favouring a hard-line opposition to any democratic opening, with Qatar – largely a minority investor in Gulf ventures in Egypt – favouring its allies the Muslim

Brotherhood as the channel into which revolutionary energies could be safely diverted. The United States initially favoured the former approach, backing Mubarak's picked successor Omar Suleiman as guarantor of an 'orderly transition', then turned to the latter only to return again to open support of Abdelfattah ElSisi once a decent interval had elapsed after the coup that brought him to power.

The closeness of the relationship between Cairo and Washington, and more especially between the military establishments of both countries, meant that the Egyptian revolution could never have been treated as a matter of small interest to US policymakers. Egypt's alignment with the United States since Sadat's turn away from the USSR in the early 1970s – the counterpart to domestic *infitah* – was the lynchpin of American strategy in the Arab world. The Camp David Accords of 1980 and subsequent Egypt-Israel peace treaty brought the most populous and central Arab state into stable, if cold, normalisation with Israel and placed Egypt firmly in the US camp. To cement this turn, US aid to Egypt reached an annual average of $1.3 billion in military aid per year between 1987 and 2013 – 'all of which finances the procurement of weapons systems and services from US defense contractors'.145

When the '18 Days' began, the United States, therefore, initially expressed a preference for an 'orderly transition' that would maintain these personal and financial bonds through Omar Suleiman as the favoured successor.146 Once Suleiman had proved unacceptable to the revolutionary street, and the lesser-known Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi ascended to the leadership of SCAF, the United States nonetheless kept up the accustomed pace of financial support to that unreformed institution: amounting to nearly $1.6 billion in 2011, and the same again in 2012.147

While providing aid to the military institution that was engaged in suppressing the ongoing revolutionary uprising, the United States nonetheless continued to seek interlocutors for an 'orderly transition'. The electoral success of the Muslim Brotherhood, and their willingness to enter into a compact with SCAF, presented such an interlocutor. If chary about the Brotherhood's Islamism, and potential stance towards Israel, the United States was eager to promote bounded transition that threatened neither the underlying economic order in Egypt nor the role of the country's regional stance. This position, which was nonetheless to unravel after the coup of July 2013, placed the US closer to Qatar than its more familiar allies in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE. The coup had placed the United States in a difficult position, having placed hopes in the Muslim Brotherhood as a partner in 'orderly transition': the Obama administration cancelled several large weapons orders and cash transfers in the autumn of 2013. The partial, and muted, US response was short-lived, however, the suspended aid and weapons exports were resumed in March 2015.148 The EU restricted its intervention to the dispatch of Catherine Ashton, High Representative for Foreign Affairs to Morsi's prison cell to check on his health.149 Throughout the SCAF and Morsi

periods, Egyptian attempts to access IMF lending were stalled by the ongoing revolutionary process, as protests continued against the austerity measures implied by IMF conditions.150 By 2016, by contrast, the counter-revolutionary regime had concluded a deal on a $12 billion IMF Extended Fund Facility package that, in the judgement of one of its authors, 'achieved its key objective of macro-economic stability, which is a precondition to attract investment' and set 'the stage for broader reforms'.151

Contrary to the notion of a liberal international order welcoming democratising revolutionaries, the remaining pillars of that order – the United States, the EU and the international financial institutions – barely demurred from the coup of 2013 and supported the regime it established. As Nathan Brownlee demonstrates, the extent of US aid since Camp David had made Washington in effect an external component of the Egyptian military and hence of the old regime itself.152 Likewise, the international financial institutions of the World Bank and IMF had since the structural adjustment plan of 1991 formed the parameters of the country's economic policy. When Sisi's counter-revolution put an end to the revolutionary situation that unsettled the geopolitical and fiscal settlements on which these relationships were based, these actors proved perfectly happy with the outcome.

A greater divergence was visible amongst Egypt's erstwhile Gulf allies, pitting the supporters of outright reversion to military authoritarian rule against those who sought to change the revolution into a limited and managed transition, reflected the results of the neoliberal *infitah* period. The Egyptian economy had become both financialised and regionalised, fusing together the upper echelons of the state – including the military and the security apparatus, local business interests and Gulf capital. The predominant players were Kuwaiti, Emirati and Saudi investors, either members of, or closely linked to, the ruling families of these monarchies. Gulf investors participated in 37 per cent, by value, of Egyptian privatisations between 2000 and 2008: nine of the twelve major banks; and huge chunks of infrastructure and real estate.153

The Egyptian revolution threatened the interests of these investors. Ending this process of contention – in other words, promoting a counterrevolution in Egypt – therefore, became a policy priority for the GCC states, wherein the separation between executive power, inherited wealth

Conclusion 141 and private investment is at most paper-thin. The GCC majority preferred a hard-line of support for SCAF and full rollback of any democratic gains, while Qatar, hitherto no enemy of Mubarak, supported the Muslim Brotherhood: both the likely victor of any democratic election and a force committed to 'ceasing unnecessary protests and strikes'.154 Qatar hosted Brotherhood leaders, such as Khairat al-Shater, and offered free exports of natural gas and $3 billion of financial aid to ease the economic pressures on Morsi's presidency.155

Qatari courtship of the Brotherhood as beneficiaries of a revolutionary uprising, and with it the implication that popular sovereignty had some role to play in the affairs of the region, was anathema to the rest of the GCC. The main method was financial one, playing to the GCC's strengths: 'first starving the Morsi government of funds and

then increasing payments to unprecedented levels' after the coup.156 Even before the fall of Mubarak, the Saudi king reportedly offered to replace US funding with Saudi subventions to keep the dictator in place.157

Funds were forthcoming to provide the support base for the counterrevolution. A remarkable exchange, allegedly recorded between Sisi's Chief of Staff and deputy defence minister in June 2013, seems to reveal the former saying 'we will need 200 hundred [thousand Egyptian pounds] tomorrow from Tamarrod's account, you know, the part from the UAE which they transferred'.158 A later recording, from Sisi's presidential campaign in 2014, features an apparent demand for 'another 10 from the U.A.E'. and incredulity at the sum of $30 billion received from the GCC to that date.159

The public record backs up this blunt assessment. Immediately after the coup, the UAE and the Saudis offered Egypt $8 billion.160 Between July 2013 and the beginning of 2015, Egypt received $23 billion from the GCC.161 By 2017, Cairo lay again at the core of a counter-revolutionary linking Abu Dhabi, Riyadh and the enthusiastically supportive Trump administration.162

Conclusion

Both Tunisia and Egypt experienced political revolutions after 2011. In Tunisia, the new political structure, based on a limited and unstable but nonetheless real, parliamentary democracy endured but at the cost of leaving the social demands of the revolution mostly unmet. Islamists and Destourians came together in 2013 to manage rather than resolve the crisis unleashed by the revolution: the former preserving their political and physical freedom, unlike their Egyptian counterparts, and the latter protecting the economic privileges they had acquired as *azlam* of the old regime. The inability to form stable administrations, beset by the ongoing social struggles they were unable either to crush or to satisfy, was the cost of this compact.

In Egypt, the political revolution in the form of (relatively) free elections was short-lived. Alienating both those who thought the revolution had gone too far and those who thought it had not gone far enough, the presidency of Mohamed Morsi was overthrown by military coup a mere twelve months into the experiment. The subsequent revived military regime (at first implicit, then open following Field Marshal Sisi's ascendancy to the presidency in 2014) implemented a thoroughgoing counterrevolution. Not just the Muslim Brotherhood but any organised dissent was outlawed and suppressed. Extensive imprisonment, torture and trauma were employed to erase the collective imagination of an alternative that had prevailed in Tahrir Square.

This counter-revolution was not simply the work of the military or the *feloul* that surrounded and supported them. The heritage of the Nasserist revolution from above provided the adhesive for a popular base – if not a majority – for the counter-revolution. Part of the revolutionary coalition could be won over, at least temporarily on this basis: augmented by popular narratives of both the Muslim Brotherhood and the revolutionaries of 25th January as an international conspiracy against the embattled Egyptian state. The afterlife of Boruguiba's *Tunisianite* played as similar if less successful role in Tunisia. Both the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Ennahda proved themselves

defenders of the social order equally eager to close the breach of the revolutionary situation, so long as they were permitted to govern that order. Both states were spared the direct counter-revolutionary intervention witnessed elsewhere. Where Qatari (and to a lesser extent, EU) predominance sustained the Tunisian compromise, the Egyptian counter-revolution was promoted and funded by the Saudi-UAE alliance with the acquiescence of the US and international lenders. The next chapter turns to the two cases where direct military intervention was extensive and the old regimes – or rather recomposed versions of them – were able to maintain themselves in power: Syria and Bahrain.

5. Militarising Counter-Revolution; Syria and Bahrain

Introduction

Syria and Bahrain may seem, at first glance, strange subjects of comparison. What could a republic of some 21 million inhabitants in 2011, which then descended into the bloodiest and longest of the post-revolutionary civil wars in the region, have in common with a tiny kingdom with twenty times fewer citizens – and whose rulers were able to re-establish order scant months after the first months of the regional *intifada?*

Disparate in size and the duration of the revolutionary episode,

Bahrain and Syria nonetheless share a common outcome: theirs were the only two rulers to retain power throughout the Arab uprisings. Others variously fled in the initial stages of the revolutions – Ben Ali and Mubarak – or were removed with the aid of external powers – Ali Abdullah Saleh and Gaddafi. The persistence of the Assads and the Khalifas points to further similarities. Although differing vastly in population size, system of rule and material base, the Syrian and Bahraini regimes resemble each other in the centrality of sectarianism and external intervention to their counter-revolutions.

In some respects, these regimes were inverted images of each other: a core ruling family drawn from a minority sect, whose cascading lines of influence and patronage then make material the sectarianism of everyday life for the population as a whole. Where the Egyptian, and to some extent the Tunisian, counter-revolutionaries could successfully forge a counter-revolutionary alliance from below based on the afterlives of national developmentalism, the Syrian and Bahraini regimes had to place greater emphasis on sectarian loyalty and external patronage – intertwining both in a generalised crisis of regional order. The resulting counterrevolutionary strategies were consequently more militarised, more destructive and more exclusionary: in the case of Syria descending into a decade of overlapping civil wars. Both counter-revolutions also relied upon what Lisa Wedeen calls 'the unceasing whirl of (over)information' on social media to present the revolutions as external conspiracies to willing audiences – whether amongst Gulf Sunnis indulging in fantasies of Iranian-directed regime change against the Khalifas, or their counterparts on the Western Left promoting a mirror-image narrative about Syria.1

Neither similarity nor difference should be overstated. Bahrain's monarchical sectarianism is overt, and the dominion of the Khalifas, the closest example amongst the Arab uprisings to pre-twenty-first century forms of counter-revolution. In Syria, by contrast, a composite and cross-sectarian elite (albeit with an Alawite core) promoted itself as

the bulwark against an impoverished (largely Sunni) majority painted as sectarian. The regime was able to draw on the afterlives of both the Ba'ath national developmentalist revolution from above of the 1970s and on the appeal of neoliberal stability and urban prosperity of the 2000s.2 Bahrain was subject only to the intervention of one counterrevolutionary alliance, Syria, to several. How were these different aspects of counter-revolution – from above, from below, and from without – intertwined?

Counter-Revolution from Above

In both Syria and Bahrain, the ruling core of the regime – and therefore the strategic nerve centre of the counter-revolutions – displayed exceptional coherence and resilience. This coherence is typically explained by reference to the group loyalty inherent in a ruling clique united by blood and marriage and divided from most of the population by religious affiliation. Unlike the other revolutionary cases, only in Syria and Bahrain was a sectarian minority (Alawite in the former and Sunni in the latter) perceived to rule over a majority belonging to a different sect.3 The Assads and the Khalifas could rely upon the power of consanguinity, and therefore the threat of bodily extinction if deposed, to provide the adhesive for their military and political levels of command. All would hang together, or hang separately.

To treat the counter-revolutionary cores of the regimes in Syria and Bahrain as merely representatives of the sect to which they belong, however, is to misread sectarianism. Interpretations of the Syrian revolution and civil war, for example, that characterise the events as a 'Sunni uprising' – or likewise a Shi'a uprising in Bahrain – endow sects with properties of unity and agency that they do not possess.4 The fact of institutionalised difference in religious belief is a banal and nearuniversal one. To be politically meaningful, these distinctions must mark a difference beyond the doctrinal. 'Sect' should be conceived of as a verb, rather than a noun – religious identities do not 'do' anything as units capable of causal action. Nor can the concepts of 'sect' and of sectarian majorities and minorities be understood as holdovers from the premodern past, determining the politics of the present: these are eminently modern categories.5 The undeniable importance of sect – and everyday sectarian prejudice – in Syrian life derives not from the fact of religious difference but from the 'concrete social relation[s]' of class and state formation.6

This argument is consistent with the idea that the Arab revolutions underwent 'sectarianization...a process shaped by political actors operating within specific contexts, pursuing political goals that involve popular mobilization around particular (religious) identity markers'.7 There is a problem with this view, however, in that it suggests sectarianism is first of all a matter of identity and second that it is something that waits to be mobilised at the appropriate point. In following the interpretation of the Lebanese Marxist Mahdi Amil, my argument for the role of sectarianism in counter-revolution instead sees the sect as a material social relation, subject to constant and ongoing re-composition.8

Sects and classes do not represent competing forms of identity or interest group membership. Rather, sect is one method by which actually existing ruling classes

are composed and maintain their rule: hence their close connection to the counter-revolution from above. The history of sectarianism in Syria and Bahrain is, therefore, inseparable from the development of capitalist social relations and the class struggles these called forth. As Adam Hanieh writes: 'the concrete conditions of class always carry specific characteristics...that are given specific social meaning through their process of coming into being'.9 Sectarianism is an ideology, a set of ideas through which political subjects interpret and act in the world, but, as Yasin Haj Saleh writes, 'what is hidden behind sectarianism is not sect but class. Social and political privileges are concealed within it, not cultural distinctions'.10 It is for this reason that, as we shall see in the case of Syria, the 'anti-sectarian' official secularism of a multi-confessional elite can produce the sectarian result of the exclusion of a majority belonging to a different sect. How, in practice, did this affect the counter-revolution in the examples of Syria and Bahrain?

Syria

The top layer of the Syrian regime – the central directing core of the revolution from above – consisted of the Assad family and clients bound by familial and business links. The Assads being Alawis, members of this sect (about 12 per cent of the population), were over-represented in the upper regime and Sunnis (about two-thirds), comprising something like two-thirds, under-represented. It is incorrect, however, to characterise the regime as 'Alawi' as such. It was a regime that co-ordinated and protected the interests of a cross-sectarian economic and political elite – a ruling class – through a security apparatus dominated by the clients, and co-religionists, of the presidential family.11 This increased reliance upon the Alawi-dominated security services reflected the withering of the regime's connection to the Sunni rural constituencies it had once absorbed and transformed in the revolution from above of the 1960s and 1970s. The survival strategy of this cross-sectarian ruling class, complete with invocations of state secularism against the Salafist threat supposedly posed by the Sunni majority, thus, had profoundly material sectarian effects.12

As an example, the make-up of the 'crisis cell' established in 2011 to manage the regime's response to the revolutionary uprising reveals the core of the counter-revolution from above. Responsible to Bashar alAssad himself, the cell further included the president's brother Maher, commander of the Presidential Guard and Fourth Armoured Division; Assef Shawkat, the president's brother-in-law and Deputy Minister of Defence. Although Alawites were over-represented, half of the cell was actually composed of Sunni leaders of the military and intelligence.13 A bomb attack on the cell in July 2012 – claimed variously by 'Liwa' al-Islam' and the FSA – killed four of its members.14

The pattern of the crisis management cell, in which loyalty and patronage established Alawi predominance but did not exclude Sunnis *per se*, was held throughout the upper echelons of the regime and its security forces. 'An absolute majority' of local and central intelligence directorates, most commanding officers and prison guards, were Alawis.15 Yet even throughout the revolution and civil war, which provoked the

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defection of high-ranking Sunni officers such as Manaf Tlass, the security apparatus retained a number of influential Sunni members: including the Minister of Defence, and the heads of state and political security.16

The Syrian counter-revolution cannot solely be identified with the policy executive of the crisis management cell – although this was the site of the crucial decisions in 2011–12. What the example of the crisis cell and military leadership demonstrate, however, is how the preservation of the regime's inner core largely based on one Alawi extended family nonetheless incorporated a cross-sectarian elite. The central principle of the regime was not that it included only Alawis (or other minority sects) but that it excluded the popular majority, who happened to be mostly Sunni. The regime and its supporters were held together by the claim to be defending cross-sectarian 'modernity and development' against that majority, portrayed as a traditionalist Sunni mass threatening progress.17

The Syrian counter-revolution from above was not limited, however, purely to the immediate presidential family or the heads of the security apparatus but rather extended to an alliance with much of the country's capitalists. Bassam Haddad identifies as fractions of the Syrian ruling class 'the new economic elite' (in both state and private varieties), the old bourgeoisie, and the independent businesspeople. The former group, largely Alawi, supports the political and security leadership even where not identical to it. Within this 'new economic elite', the outer sections of regime-linked capital, as opposed to the old merchant families, established themselves in the high period of Syrian revolution from above in the 1970s and moved with the times, becoming private businessmen as the economy was neoliberalised.

Although more widely spread and less directly connected to the ruling family – as well as more Sunni – their reliance on closeness to the regime ensures their loyalty. The old Sunni (and Christian) urban merchants had mostly abandoned their opposition to the Ba'athist radicalism of the 1960s and reached an accommodation with Hafez al-Assad and then his son.18 The suppression of the 'events' of 1977–82 and the Hama revolt led not to the disappearance of 'local notables...landlords in the Jazira... industrialists and traders in Damascus, Aleppo and other cities' but to their subordinate incorporation in the state-led bourgeoisie. The second generation of Ba'ath leaders – the sons of those of the 1960s – relied upon a new collective identity as the promoters of market prosperity, authoritarian stability and the defence of a modernity conceived as threatened by the pious majority.19

At the heart of this compact was the idea that fear of Sunni majority resentment would serve to bind the religious minorities, and particularly the Alawis, to the ruling core even as they suffered the same political repression as other Syrians. Opposition currents strong amongst Alawis were subject to exemplary repression.20 Imprisoned non-Sunni oppositionists were often told by their jailers that they were threatening a regime that protected them.21 Such blackmail was not necessarily effective: of the signatories to the opposition 'Manifesto of the 99' issued at the coming to power of Bashar al-Assad in 2000, fully one-third were Alawis.22

This pattern of sectarian incorporation, providing the buttress for a cross-sectarian ruling class, thus formed the social substrate of the Syrian counter-revolution. The strategy of the regime throughout was to keep the Sunni bourgeoisie and professional middle class on-side – by carrot or stick – and use the threat of Sunni chauvinist Islamism to bind the religious minorities to its cause. The Sunni community was divided by the revolution. Most, but not all, of the bourgeoisie and certainly the official religious establishment were firmly behind the regime. Those who displayed ambiguous or pro-opposition leanings were also liable to regime punishment by seizing their holdings or accusations of supporting 'terrorists'. 23

If the Syrian counter-revolution from above was not limited to the core of the regime, the existence of a central body such as the crisis management cell did permit an effective strategic response to the uprising. From the outset, even before the first protests began, the core of the Syrian regime chose a coercive response. The regime's strategy of counterrevolution was to 'divide, radicalize, repress'.24 The minutes of the crisis management cell from August 2011 reveal the co-ordinating core of the counter-revolution was aghast at the 'laxness in handling the crisis', which was to be attributed to 'weak co-ordination and co-operation among security bodies'.25 A new approach was adopted of consolidating areas of control 'once each sector has been cleansed of wanted people'.26 Rather than stretch itself too thin suppressing protests that would overwhelm the security forces in any particular town, Damascus adopted the tactic of withdrawing all of its forces at once from the restive cities returning in fuller force to deal with them one by one. These operations would follow a common pattern of surrounding the town or neighbourhood with armoured vehicles, shelling the area and sealing it with checkpoints and then entering the streets to carry out mass arrests.27 This strategy allowed the preservation of the hold on the coastal strip, Damascus and most of Aleppo while grinding out a siege of the areas under revolutionary administration, further reducing the appeal of any alternative to its rule.

This strategy – although dependent upon the advantage of time and Russian and Iranian support – explains the particularly destructive character of the Syrian counter-revolution. The UN stopped tracking fatalities in 2014 – by 2016 UN special envoy to Syria, Staffan De Mistura, estimated the death toll at 400,000.28 The Syrian Centre for Policy Research, using epidemiological data, estimates 470,000 dead by the start of 2016: 11 per cent of the entire population having been killed or injured in the armed conflict up to that point.29 Although all the participants in the war killed civilians, destroyed infrastructure and forced people into exile, the bulk of the death and destruction could be laid at the foot of the regime and its international allies. Of the running total of civilian deaths in 2016, 92.92 per cent were killed by regime forces; 1.75 per cent by Russian forces (this was after only three months of Russian intervention); 1.81 per cent by armed opposition factions; and 1.48 per cent by ISIS.30 Civilians comprised 70.6 per cent of the dead – opposition combatants 29.4 per cent – and 57.3 per cent of civilian deaths were caused by 'wide area weapons of shelling and air bombardments' that only the regime and its allies possessed.31 The Violations

Documentation Centre, an organisation that records killings and detentions by both regime and opposition forces, recorded 20,281 deaths by execution:

92.4 per cent of these being civilians.32 The photographs and documents provided by the defector 'Ceasar' depicted eleven thousand corpses of tortured detainees, each identified by a serial number and the name of the intelligence branch in which they had been killed.33

The policy of counter-revolution pursued by the Syrian regime was thus a simple one: to besiege and bombard its opponents to death. In rendering the opposition areas uninhabitable, this also provoked the mass flight of the population. 5.6 million people fled the country, and

6.6 million were internally displaced between 2011 and 2019: in total, a majority of the population were forced to flee their homes.34 Where the Egyptian counter-revolution relied upon mainly carceral means to remove revolutionaries from the wider society, its Syrian counterpart literally expelled them from the country. This is not to downplay the role of detention in the Syrian case. The SNHR documented 144,889 instances of forced disappearance or arbitrary detention between 2011 and 2019, 88.63 per cent or approximately 98,000, at the hands of the regime.35

The majority of these detentions and disappearances – 55,557 – occurred between 2011 and 2013, and with the largest concentrations in the Damascus suburbs and Zabadani, lending strength to the conclusion that they were intended to repress the revolutionary protest movement.36 Torture and sexual assault were widespread, inside and outside of regime prisons. Part of the efficacy of this practice was to rely on existing patriarchal norms amongst the rebellious communities themselves: since rape could be taken to 'dishonour' an entire family or community, the very threat of detention of women had a debilitating effect.37 As in Egypt, but at a much higher intensity and greater extent, the Syrian counter-revolution made use of bodily trauma to erase the experience of collective freedom and revolutionary self-hood. The Syrian regime had long practised such techniques, not least in the levelling of Hama in response to the 'events' of 1982. The purpose of this extreme violence, familiar from earlier counter-revolutionary episodes such as the suppression of the Paris Commune or the German revolution of 1918–19, was not simply military but political: to undo the revolutionary subject and return the revolutionaries to the state of abjection against which they had revolted.38

Indeed, the chief characteristic of the Syrian counter-revolution was abjection writ large: isolating and besieging the liberated areas, which might otherwise present an alternative to the regime. In this policy lay the origins of the Syrian civil war, which itself formed part of the counterrevolution. Both opponents and supporters of the Syrian revolution have been keen to distinguish between revolution and civil war: the latter in order to insist upon the revolutionary legitimacy of the Syrian uprising and the former to deny it, referring instead simply to 'the war' or 'the events'. A glance at the historical record reveals the flimsiness of this distinction. Revolution and civil war typically accompany one another – because revolutions disrupt the monopoly of

violence held by the state and threaten the interests of the old order embodied in it – hence the frequency with which confrontations between revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries become armed conflicts, spiralling outwards to embrace pre-existing rivalries from the local to global scale. The Syrian revolution conforms to, rather than violates, historical type.

The multiple conflicts that comprised this decade-long war, still smouldering at the time of writing, could be imperfectly divided into four phases. The first phase, from summer of 2011 until the spring of 2012, was marked by the initial arming of the revolution and the formation of the FSA. The frustrated regime offensive on Homs in the spring of 2012 began the second phase, the high tide of the armed rebellion and FSA – taking half of Aleppo and threatening Damascus from the suburbs. From 2013 to 2015, the armed opposition became increasingly dominated by armed Islamists, especially after the regime's chemical weapons attacks in the Ghouta on the periphery of Damascus.39 The crucial development of this period was the rise of ISIS and the clash between this organisation and the forces of the Kurdish 'Democratic Union Party' (the PYD) in the North-East, which also drew in extensive international intervention and eventually an incursion by Turkey. The fourth phase commenced with the entry of Russian air power in the autumn of 2015, which ended any real prospect of the regime again losing control – instead mopping the remaining pockets of resistance through local 'de-escalation' agreements under Russo-Turkish tutelage. The civil war also transformed its combatants in counter-revolutionary ways. The violent repression of the uprising, as well as the districts in which it was concentrated, was accompanied by the release of the leaders of armed Islamist groups. It would be an overstatement to see groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra/Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, Ahrar al-Sham, or ISIS as simply collaborators of the regime. Nor did the Assad regime have any interest in being overthrown by them. Nonetheless, while the prisons were being filled with revolutionary protestors, armed Islamists were being released. In May and June of 2011, the regime issued an amnesty to scores of these prisoners – who 'were certain' of the regime 'knowing full well' they would 'take up arms against it'.40 These included the founders of Jaysh al-Islam, of Ahrar al-Sham and the future ISIS 'emirs' of Raqqa and Homs.41 The regime was no stranger to such tactics, having facilitated the entry of armed Islamists into both Iraq and Lebanon in the service of its foreign policy objectives: the transformation of the revolutionary upsurge into an Islamist-led military campaign would solidify support for Assad at home and abroad. 42

The policies of the regime were not the only source of counterrevolutionary pressure. One must distinguish between the popular uprising and alternative forms of governance to which it gave birth, the externally based opposition that positioned itself as the legitimate successor to that uprising, and the armed groups pursuing the fight against the regime. The uprising reflected the social strata from which it emerged. Although diverse, many of its participants undoubtedly saw their vision of a more democratic and socially - just Syria as rooted in their Islamic faith and culture. Once an armed conflict began – lacking any organ of legitimate popular co-ordination to direct the

constellation of brigades calling themselves the Free Syrian Army – the logic of the command of violence took over from that of winning over the street. In some towns, such as Daraya, the local revolutionary council retained civilian control over the brigade and subordinated the armed struggle to the broader objectives of the revolution.

These were by far the exception, however. Without the ability to raise taxes, the local councils and revolutionary committees could not fund any military struggle. Military leadership predictably then devolved onto local leaders who could. Over time, the search for funds introduced a dynamic of predation – looting and kidnapping – into the *kata'ib* of the FSA, as well as some of the inherited practices of the regime army from which so many had defected.43 The armed part of the uprising initially reflected the political continuum of the movement as a whole. The dominant politics were a kind of majoritarian (Sunni) Syrian nationalism, combined with political democracy as its horizon; less present in the armed militias were the political activists of the non-regime Left and liberal currents central to the protest movement.44 The Muslim Brotherhood, having been crushed in the early 1980s, operated mainly in the external opposition. As Turkish protection and Gulf donors, especially from Kuwait and the UAE, provided more funding for arms, conservative Sunni politics likewise began to predominate in the military opposition.45 Fractions such as Jaysh al-Islam and Ahrar al-Sham were distinct from mutations of al-Qaeda in Syria – Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS – but grew in the same soil. Many revolutionaries who had seen the inside of Assad's prisons found themselves detained by the armed *takfiris*.46

The strategy of isolation, repression and radicalisation was the predominant one adopted in the Syrian counter-revolution, but attempts at co-option were not entirely absent. In response to the initial uprising – which it nonetheless denounced as a foreign conspiracy against the Syrian people – the regime proclaimed a series of apparently placatory reforms. Public sector salaries and pensions were increased: this also had the effect of reminding the regime's support base in the security services and other forms of public employment what they stood to lose from disloyalty. The state of emergency under which the country had been ruled for three decades was lifted, just as such an emergency engulfed the country. In a sop to conservative Islamic opinion, the regime lifted the ban on the wearing of the *niqab* by public schoolteachers and shut the one casino in the country.47 A new constitution, confirmed in a 2012 referen- dum confined mostly to regime-held areas, removed the *de jure* 'leading role of the Baᶜath party' and also deleted the article describing Syria as a 'planned socialist economy'.48 In the presidential elections of 2014 held under the new constitution, Assad won 88.7 per cent of the vote against a notional candidate of the technocratic Right–Hassan al-Nouri – and one of the pro-regime Left–Maher Hajjar.49

With the retaking of Aleppo under Russian auspices in 2016 and the shrinkage of territory held by non-regime forces, including the PYD, effectively to a Turkish protectorate around Idlib by 2019, the triumph of counter-revolution in Syria was complete. In some areas, under the flag of 'de-escalation agreements' brokered through Russia and Turkey, former combatants of the Free Syrian Army were integrated into

regime forces, implying a degree of decentralisation of regime power.50 Nonetheless, the mass revolt from below of 2011 and the alternative institutions it called into being had long been destroyed and dispersed.

Syria's counter-revolution, relying upon a military response closely tied to the core ruling group, seems the opposite of Tunisia's. Yet the Syrian regime did not rely solely on familial relationships to build its counter-revolutions: even this comparatively narrow ruling class had to attempt to build a base of counter-revolution from below.

Bahrain

In Bahrain, the house of Khalifa preserved its rule over a statelet still largely intact – although deliberate destruction, for example, of Shi'a mosques or the Pearl Round-about itself, was not absent from the counter-revolutionary armoury. Nonetheless, the same admixture of sectarian identification garnering a – comparatively narrow but still extant – base of support from below for the counter-revolution from above was visible in Bahrain as in Syria. The two states differ, however, not only in the inversion of the sectarian calculus (a Sunni minority regime ruling over a majority Shi'a population) but in the nature of Bahraini sectarianism. The Bahraini ruling class, firmly rooted in the Khalifa family, cannot be described as cross-sectarian: a few exceptions aside, it was Sunni. The much more direct form of sectarianism in Bahrain reflected the kingdom's history, lacking the modernising revolutions from above, seen in the Arab republics, and reliant instead upon the hydrocarbon revenues typical of its Gulf neighbours. Nonetheless, Bahraini sectarianism also served a fundamentally political and counter-revolutionary function: dividing and repressing challenges to Khalifa rule, such as that posed by the Left and Arab nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s or the example of the Iranian revolution after 1979.

At the core of the Bahraini counter-revolution lay, of course, the ruling family themselves.

In origin and method of rule, the *Aal Khalifa* differed little from their neighbours in the United Arab Emirates or Qatar. Hailing originally as conquerors of the island of Bahrain from the interior of the Arabian Peninsula, they were fortunate to find first protectors in the British Empire and then in oil, a source of revenue to sustain their rule after the (late and partial) departure of their patrons. Following British withdrawal from the 'trucial states' in 1971, the Bahraini state apparatus was built around the Khalifas. Conscious that their claim to the country derived from conquest, the family guarded its executive positions even more jealously than its neighbours. The emir – after 2002 the King – of course, inherited his position through the patriarchal line: King Hamad ascending to the throne in 1999. The Kings' uncle Khalifa bin Salman remains at the time of writing the only occupant of the position of prime minister the kingdom has had since independence in 1971.

As in other Gulf monarchies, the wider clan of the ruling family extended much further than the palace and includes different factions within the 5,000-strong *Aal Khalifa*. Bahraini political, security and economic institutions endowed this caste of petty royals with various forms of material and symbolic privilege. A tiny proportion

of a small total population, they were reported to hold a third of 'economic wealth', a third of land ownership, and third of 'key political positions': a further third cascading to the non-royal Sunni, and the rest to the Shi'a majority of the population.51

A further faction beyond the immediate ruling family – the

'Khawalid' – occupied central positions in the security apparatus, such as the Ministry of Defence, the Head of the National Security Agency, the Ministry of Justice and the commander of the Bahraini Defence Force. From these positions, the Khawalid promulgated and prosecuted the hard line of counter-revolution in 2011. The Khawalid represents the closest thing in the history of the Arab uprisings to classic feudal reaction on the European counter-revolutionary model. This faction derives from the line of the Khalifas, who fought British reforms in the 1920s that subjected Sunni tribal landlord and Shi'a peasant cultivator alike to civil legal equality.52

Where counter-revolution in Syria mutated into a decade-long civil war, the sharply repressive turn of the Khalifa monarchy in Bahrain bore fruit within weeks – due, as noted in the final section of this chapter, largely to the external intervention of the GCC. Although opting for allout repression once outside sponsorship was secured, the response of the Bahraini regime was initially more stumbling than its Syrian counterpart. The Bahraini security forces used lethal measures from the very beginning of the uprising – indeed, even before. Fearing the example set by Tunisia and Egypt, the security forces pre-emptively arrested 23 people in January and February 2011 on grounds of belonging to a 'terrorist network' planning to overthrow the government.53 On the 14th of February, the first day of the uprising, Abdulla Msheima was killed by a short-range shotgun blast to the head, fired from a police weapon. Msheima's death was followed by that of Ali Salman Matrouk on the 17th of February. The attempt on that day to clear the occupation of the Pearl Roundabout involved around 1,000 police, Bahraini Defence Force troops and members of *mukhabarat* agencies used tear gas, rubber bullets and shotgun rounds to disperse the protestors, killing three.54

As this attempted act of repression backfired and the protests intensified, the King and his advisors showed signs of cracking: dismissing three of the most unpopular ministers and allowing exiled opposition figures to return to the kingdom. As the movement grew larger and more radical and confronted the forces of popular sectarian reaction – discussed in the next section as the social base for counter-revolution – the Khalifas were forced to choose. Assured of the military backing of 1,500 GCC troops, on the 16th of March, the Bahraini police and security forces cleared the Pearl Roundabout occupation: thereafter, all manner of official and unofficial violence was unleashed on the protestors as 'security forces and pro-regime thugs armed with swords and clubs attacked demonstrators throughout the kingdom, killing seven in the first three days and injuring many more'.55

Security forces entered the Salmaniya Medical Complex, arbitrarily arresting medics and confining injured protestors to two wards.56

A thousand demonstrators were arrested in the 24 hours between the 16th and 17th of March 2011.57 In total, the Ministry of Interior recorded 1,950 arrests in relation

to the uprising, the National Security Agency 122, the National Guard 103, and the Bahraini Defence Forces

100.58 The Bahraini Commission of Inquiry provides a conservative estimate of thirty-five deaths from mid-February to mid-April 2011, thirteen directly attributed to the Bahraini state: a higher total of 60 for 2011–2012 being reported by news agencies.59 At least five of these died under torture.60 Alongside the killings, arrests and sackings – the latter detailed in the previous section – the monarchy and its supporters mounted a campaign of vilification against its opponents on old and new media.61 Keen to wipe away the physical memory of the revolt, the regime demolished the Pearl Roundabout itself on the 18th of March.

The protests were not entirely quelled by the repression, although the more organised forces of the General Federation of Bahraini Trade Unions (GFBTU) and the Al-Wefaq party retreated in the face of the onslaught. Younger and more militant cadres, mostly in the outlying Shi'a villages (effectively suburbs of Manama), kept up a sporadic campaign of resistance. This pattern of sectarian residential segregation gave the crackdown something of the character, in milder form, of the siege warfare practised in Syria: the security forces setting up checkpoints at the entrances to Shi'a villages and bombarding the protests of local youths with tear gas and rubber bullets.62

The legal infrastructure for the repression was provided by the 'State of National Safety' declared on the 15th of March, which provided for special courts to try those accused of participation in the uprising.63 The provisions of this declaration expired in June 2011, but the subsequent two rounds of 'National Dialogue' went nowhere: unsurprisingly since widespread repression continued throughout them. Once the state of national safety expired, the Khalifas relied – in common with all the Arab counter-revolutionaries – on counter-terrorist legislation. Typically nebulous in its definition of terrorism, and allowing for sixty days pretrial detention, this law was used to try a case on average every ten days in 2013, with defendants sentenced on average of ten years' imprisonment each.64

Protests did not disappear from the streets, but the Khalifas were determined to prevent any repeat of 2011. In October of 2012, the Ministry of Interior banned all public rallies and continued arrests at attempts to commemorate the anniversary of the uprising.65 There remained 4,000 political prisoners in Bahrain in 2017, including the 'Bahrain 13', comprising most of the leaders of the country's opposition – between 2013 and 2017, 500 cases of arrests of Bahraini citizens, including 370 allegations of torture, were recorded.66 In 2013 and 2014, King Hamad greatly expanded the bases upon which Bahraini citizens could be deprived of their citizenship. Three hundred and thirty Bahrainis had their citizenship revoked between 2012 and 2016, the majority of them Shi'a.67 Parliamentary elections were held – and boycotted by the opposition – in 2014, replicating the gerrymandering and sectarian practices of pre-2011 polls.68 The largest opposition party, Al-Wefaq, was itself dissolved in 2016, and human rights activists, such as Zeinab al-Khawaja, were chased out of the country with the threat of multiple prison terms – the latter on grounds of lèse-majesté.69 In 2013, the King enacted

twenty-two laws, proposed by the national assembly, effectively banning protests in Manama.70 As in Syria, the popular revolutionary tide of 2011 had been turned back.

Counter-Revolution from Below

The task of counter-revolutionaries, it will be recalled, is to build a political subject (and coercive force) capable of overcoming the revolution. Restricted to the core of the counter-revolution from above, however, the enterprise is unlikely to succeed. In Egypt and Tunisia, the counter-revolutionary appeal to national unity and stability relied upon the respective afterlives of Nasserist and Bourguibist revolutions from above. Such inheritances were weaker (although not absent) in Syria and non-existent in Bahrain. These regimes, therefore, relied upon narrower but stronger bonds of sectarian affiliation, boosted by external support, to maintain themselves – a riskier and more violent but eventually successful strategy. Both also relied on the overflow of information created by new forms of social media to reduce the 'capacity to maintain or develop a revolutionary narrative'.71

The success of such a strategy does not imply, however, that sectarianism is merely an idea nor simply the manipulation of a passive mass. Sectarianism, to recapitulate the point made earlier, is a material system of political domination and economic reward: 'a history of political and ideological class practices of the dominant bourgeoisie in the goal of perpetuating that class domination' as Mahdi Amel writes.72 Where this claim may seem easier to substantiate in the case of Lebanon, in both Syria and Bahrain sectarianism was embodied not just in the ideas or prejudices entertained by members of one sect towards others. Rather sectarianism was embedded in the actually existing political economy of domination in Syria and Bahrain – sectarianism was part of the social order challenged by the revolutions, and therefore part of the counterrevolutions to protect that order.

Syria

'Sects' were not the protagonists of the Syrian revolution – but rather one of the methods by which that revolution was countered. What rendered this method effective was the material reality of sect: 'hidden behind sectarianism is not sect but class'.73 Surveys of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, five years after the outbreak of the revolution, substantiate this point. Although the majority of Sunni respondents supported the opposition, the majority of regime supporters were also Sunni.74 Although most respondents were poor (partially also an effect of the survey site amongst refugee camps), opposition supporters were poorer.75 As noted earlier, opposition control was concentrated in poorer and working-class areas. This dynamic was at its sharpest in Aleppo, where the military division of the city into eastern and western halves mapped onto its class geography.

This division amongst the Sunnis – rendering any notion of the sect as a unitary actor redundant – derived from the political economy of the pre-2011 regime. Poverty, unemployment and precariousness consequent upon the turn to 'the social market economy' in 2005 were concentrated in rural areas and in the urban peripheries inhabited by recent migrants from those areas. These were to become the heartlands

of the revolution in 2011: the link between the Ba'ath regime, with its crosssectarian but disproportionately Alawi core, and provincial and rural Sunni populations was severed.76

Differential access to a labour market incapable of providing sufficient employment represented a further aspect of the material operation of sectarianism. Rural Sunnis and Alawis increasingly migrated to the urban peripheries (especially of Damascus and Homs) between 1980 and 2011. Yet where the latter were more likely to have personal and family connections to gain employment in the public sector or security services, the former remained more likely to be trapped in precarious and informal employment. Thus, as Salwa Ismail writes, 'socio-economic antagonisms that arose because of differentiated relations to the regime and apparatuses of power came to be interpreted in sectarian terms'.77 Both wealthy Sunnis and (some) poor Alawis could find avenues of inclusion in the regime: poor Sunnis mostly could not.

These differentiated relations produced (or reinforced) patterns of geographical and residential segregation, which would provide sources of recruitment for pro-regime militias, and enabled the siege tactics that were crucial to the regime's counter-revolutionary strategy. Syrian towns were frequently divided between the historic *balad* and more recent *mahatta*, where public buildings, security offices and associated accommodation were located. A marked example was to be found in Homs, where the revolutionary stronghold of Baba 'Amr was populated by mainly Sunni rural and Bedouin migrants, while the residents of districts such as 'Akrama and Naziha were mainly Alawis working in the public sector or security services. 78 A similar example would be found in Mou'adamiyya (a mainly Sunni suburb dominated by informal employment) and Sumariyya, established as a residential suburb for regime troops in 1983 and 'identified (by residents and outsiders) as as 'Alawi, security-driven, reliant on regime patronage, and poor'.79

Such was the social geography of the uprising. Nonetheless, the protests were far from a purely Sunni affair. Many of the leading activists came from non-Sunni backgrounds. The demands and slogans raised were mainly of a consciously anti-sectarian character.80 In the large demonstrations such as that in Homs in the spring of 2011, '[a]ll the sects were present...people from all over the city and the suburbs'.81 Famous Alawi personalities, such as the actress Fadwa Soleiman or the author Samar Yazbek, joined the uprising: the former leading a chant of 'The Syrian People are One' in Homs.82 The revolutionary activists and initial formations of the FSA perceived the risk of sectarian conflict and attempted to forestall it.83 The 'Alawite League of Co-ordinating Committees and Figures on the Syrian Coast' founded in the autumn of 2011 declared that 'the Alawi community was not responsible for barbaric acts being committed against the demonstrators' and affirmed the 'duties to liberate the Golan84 and...the entire march of the democratic transformation'.85 Even in 2012, once the armed conflict had begun, the *Kata'ib al-Wahda Al-Wataniya* ('National Unity Battalions'), a cross-sectarian 'coalition of battalions and brigades with a clear secular and anti-sectarian leaning' commanded 2,000 fighters in the North Syrian countryside.86

In Baniyas, a city with a history of particularly acute sectarian residential segregation, an Alawi bus driver was attacked during the demonstration on the 18th of March 2011: he was released after the intervention of local imam Anas al-Ayrout, who led the crowd in a chant of 'Sunni, Alawi, we all want freedom'.87 In a particularly sharp illustration of the fate of the Syrian revolution, by 2013 Ayrout was calling for revenge attacks on Alawi communities around Lattakia.88

Although the protests were cross-sectarian, the majority of their participants were undoubtedly Sunni – as in the population as a whole. From the beginning of the uprising, therefore, the regime portrayed the movement as the tentacles of a foreign-backed conspiracy of Sunni extremists planning to exterminate the religious minorities. The regime's counter-revolutionary appeals blended together not only sectarian practice mixed with officially anti-sectarian rhetoric but an admixture of the afterlives of the different phases of the Ba'athist regime. These included the nation-building, anti-imperialist Ba'athist revolution from above in the 1970s, analogous to Nasserist rhetoric in Egypt; the civil war posture of the suppression of the 1977–82 revolts and the destruction of Hama; and the image of neoliberal modernity, stability and development promoted in the early years of Bashar al-Assad's rule.89

It was this mixed heritage that allowed the regime to claim a 'revolutionary' legitimacy. The class basis of the pre-1963 *ancien regime* had lain in the urban notables and absentee landlords, interlocutors of the French colonial power, who exercised powers of extra-economic coercion over the direct producers: the latter belonging to all sects, although most were Sunni or Alawite and few Christian.90 The fusion of Akram Hawrani's Arab Socialist Party with the Ba'ath in 1952 paved the way for the dispossession of this predatory agrarian elite, a process begun with the agrarian reform law of 1958 and further extended in 1963.91 Following the collapse of the United Arab Republic with Egypt, the hybrid partyarmy state of the Ba'ath under Saleh Jadid sought a combined confrontation with the external enemy, Israel, and the internal, the absentee landlord class and commercial bourgeoisie. This revolution from above represented the displaced culmination of the class struggles and mass movements of the 1950s, throwing out the 'traditional oligarchy' in favour of a 'whole new political elite of a distinctly plebeian, rural lower middle class "ex-peasant" social composition'.92 The holdings of the old merchants were nationalised and the lands of their agrarian counterparts disbursed by the land reform of 1964. $50 million worth of assets were confiscated in 1965, and industrial production went from 25 per cent state-controlled to 75 per cent.93

The effect of this land reform was not to collectivise the countryside but embourgeoisifying it. Where the top layer of landowners had once formed about 1 per cent of the population with fully half of the land, after reform this was reduced to 0.5 per cent holding under a fifth.94 The landless peasantry, 60 per cent of the rural population before reform, almost halved in number to 36.1 per cent and were mostly absorbed into the small and middle peasantry holding 82.2 per cent of post-reform lands.95 Agrarian reform abolished neither poverty nor property: but it did produce 'a stratum made up

of middle peasants and the viable half of the small holders...[whose] control of around 60% of the land...replac [ed] the once dominant landed magnates'..96

Even the insurgency of the late 1970s, culminating in first an uprising in and then the partial destruction of the city of Hama, did not succeed in dissolving the bond consequently established between middle peasantry and the Ba'ath regime. This latter insurgency was not without mass support but also took on the character of a counter-revolution of the old Sunni landlords and notables against the Ba'athist revolution from above.97 The Baᶜath revolution from above represented a victory of the middle and lower peasantry, of whom the most radical members often, but not exclusively, came from religious minorities, over the – primarily but not exclusively Sunni – absentee landholding and mercantile elite of the cities. State co-operatives replaced landlord power in the countryside not by abolishing private property but by taking over the functions once performed by its largest holders – credit, seed provision, marketing and so on.98 The Ba'ath built a form of state capitalism that shifted without significant conflict to the more private variety, first, under the 'corrective movement' of Hafez al-Assad in the early seventies and then the more thorough-going programme of his son three decades later.99 Syria shifted from being a society of petty agricultural producers dominated by urbanbased absentee landlords to one of 'rurban' small town and peripheral city dwellers dependent on some form of wage labour (often in state employment) and/or small commerce to survive.100 This was both the achievement of the Ba'ath revolution from above and the basis for the uprising of 2011.

The blend of the civil war rhetoric of early '80s Ba'athism with defence of the image of neoliberal stability that replaced it proved remarkably effective. The populations of the more upmarket areas of Damascus and Aleppo were 'noticeably absent from the protests' in 2011: an absence reflecting not necessarily support for the regime but a 'grey zone' indulging in 'fantasies of accommodation...order...[and] marketoriented prosperity' and state-sponsored multi-sectarianism. The initial public relations campaigns of the regime played to these desires, adorning Damascus billboards with posters warning against fi*tna* ('discord') and others proclaiming 'I am with the law'. The regime was also able to rely on a media milieu 'indebted (*mahsub*)' to it that also that reflected the aspirational culture of the early Bashar years.101 The private but state-aligned media owned by Rami Makhlouf (such as the *Dunya* television channel) provided prominent outlets for such material.102

Amongst some of the upper professional classes of all sects who had benefitted from the reforms of the Bashar years – with jobs in new private educational institutions, new media or banking ventures – 'development and modernization' provided the adhesive to the counter-revolution from above. In this imaginary, the uprising represented the threat of the *mutakhalifun* or 'backward' and impoverished majority against which the regime offered the only defence.103

The residential segregation of the majority made possible the use of indiscriminate counter-revolutionary violence against them and the circulation of narratives that undermined the prospect of revolutionary unity. In the early days of the Arab revolutions,

new forms of social media enabled by the ubiquitous technology of the mobile phone had been hailed as the progenitors of a new wave of liberal democratic uprisings.104 The experience of the counter-revolutions demonstrated that rather the 'unceasing whirl of (over)information' consisting of 'both direct [regime] propaganda efforts and an ability to exploit issues put into circulation by others' was profoundly debilitating for the revolutionary movements. This was particularly, although far from exclusively, the case in Syria where the regime's 'Syrian Electronic Army' exploited both the surveillance opportunities of online communication and its own and supporters' array of social media accounts to counterrevolutionary ends.105

The framing of the three most well-known chemical weapons attacks (in the eastern Ghouta in 2013, Khan Sheikhun in 2017 and Douma in 2018) as 'false-flag' incidents masterminded by the opposition to provoke Western intervention formed a part of this strategy.106 If the rebels were indeed attempting such a ruse, it was singularly unsuccessful. The Ghouta attack led only to the Russian-US agreement that the regime would de-commission its chemical weaponry, a condition clearly not met four years later. The attack on Khan Sheikhun led to US missile strikes that killed nine Syrian servicemen and that on Douma to US-led air strikes that led to no verified deaths. The core claim of these 'false flag' narratives was that Assad had no reason to use chemical weapons because he was winning the war. Chemical weapons use, however, was a common tactic by regime forces and one reason why they were winning the war. The UNHCR Commission of Inquiry on Syria, for example, documented 30 instances of chemical weapons use by 2017, and Human Rights Watch 85, of which fifty were easily ascribed to the regime and three to ISIS.107 These far less well-known instances, which did not reach the global stage, never featured in the 'false flag' narrative. More important than the frequently incredible content of these stories was their disorienting effect.108 As Eric Selbin has demonstrated, the building of a revolutionary narrative that can appeal to the more ambivalent parts of the population is central to revolutionary success.109 The hypersaturated information environment of social media fatally undermined the building of such a narrative: forming another means of crushing the 'revolutionary exuberance' of 2011.110

Whatever the propaganda claims, the selective deployment of violence (usually without chemical weapons) against mainly Sunni populations in mixed areas is well-documented and contributed most to the sectarianisation of the conflict. The Syrian Network for Human Rights records 56 'sectarian' massacres between 2011 and 2015. Forty-nine of these were attributed to the regime or pro-regime militias: between March 2011 and June 2013 massacres by no other forces were recorded. Twenty-two, or roughly 45 per cent, of these forty-nine incidents occurred in the Homs governorate, both confessionally mixed and a centre of the revolution.111 The target of such massacres was not just the community in which they were carried out but that from which its perpetrators would be perceived to come. The prospect of revenge being exacted on Alawis or other religious minorities exerted further pressure on members of those sects to side with the regime as their only protector. In 2011, Christians and 'Alawi interviewees

insisted that protestors in Homs chanted 'Christians to Beirut, Alawis to the Coffin' although none could provide a first-hand account of hearing it themselves.112

By 2013, opposition militias were indeed carrying out sectarian massacres on their own account.113 Such atrocities appeared with domination of the military opposition by groups such as the openly sectarian Jabhat al-Nusra but also the participation or at least acquiescence of some units of the FSA. The logic of sectarian massacre thus unleashed undermined attempts at revolutionary cross-sectarian unity by identifying entire communities as either '*shabiha*' or 'terrorists'.114 These communities would then seek protection from militias of their co-religionists, exacerbating the logic of sectarian confrontation.

The link between the cross-sectarian elite that surrounded the regime and the violence on the ground – between the counter-revolution from above and below – was thus provided by militias funded by regime businessmen and often, but not always, sectarian in composition. Defections rendered most of the units of the Syrian Arab Army unreliable. Many conscripts were, in any case, unwilling to serve outside their home areas. The military force of the counter-revolution, therefore, relied upon two kinds of militias, in practice not always distinct: the *shabiha*, or semi-criminal enforcers equivalent to the *baltageyya* in Egypt, and the 'popular committees'. Both were formalised as the mili- tias of the National Defence Forces (*Quwaat al-Difaa" al-Watanii*) of 120,000–150,000 fighters established in 2013.115

The *shabiha* originated in the smuggling trade outsourced to regime clients and allies in the 1980s. From this specific regional meaning, *shabiha* came to function as a derogatory blanket term for all regime supporters – or even a sectarian insult directed at Alawis.116 The term was re-appropriated by regime partisans themselves: rallying his supporters in Ummayyad Square in Damascus in January 2012, Bashar al-Assad was met with the popular chant '*shabiha lil-abad li-ajl 'ayounak ya asad*' or 'Shabiha forever, for your eyes, [i.e. for your sake] oh Assad!'117 A counter-revolutionary culture, distinct from the appeals to 'modern- ization and development' mounted towards the Damascene and Aleppine upper middle class, formed around these groups. Expressed in tattoos of Bashar al-Assad and songs and slogans exalting his rule and that of his family, this culture reflected the very material ladders of patronage linking the lowliest *shabih* to the ruling inner clique.118 Unlike the civilian narratives of the defence of modernity and neoliberal stability, this form of counter-revolutionary appeal directly harked back to the civil war atmosphere of the early 1980s and the homosocial hardness of the barracks – recalling the similar culture of, for example, the counter-revolutionary *Freikorps* in the German revolution of

1919–1920.119 Where, in statements directed towards ambivalent civil- ians or Western observers, regime spokespeople highlighted the misogyny of some of their opponents, the *shabiha* hailed '[t]he era of masculinity and men' illustrated with posters of Putin and Assad bedecked in combat fatigues and sunglasses.120 Abjection beneath the military boot featured prominently in this counter-revolutionary culture – some-

times with the heel of a Syrian Arab Army soldier pictured on the head of an abstract figure representing the FSA.121

From breaking up initial demonstrations and pursuing and attacking demonstrators, these activities soon graduated to sectarian massacres. Although the victims of such massacres were usually Sunni, this does not mean that their perpetrators were never Sunnis. Tribally recruited militias in the east of the country were often Sunni in composition, as were the powerful Ba'ath Brigade militia in Aleppo.122 'Popular committees' were established most often in Alawi or Christian areas, which then served as the basis for the NDF militias.123 Many of these militias were funded by businessmen of the cross-sectarian regime elite.124

These militias were joined by the mobilising arms of the Baʿath state in recruiting militia fighters: the corporatist trade unions and peasant organisations, and the party itself. The total number of regime militia under arms is difficult to establish but seems to have exceeded the usable strength of the Syrian Arab Army. According to the Institute for Strategic Studies, total regime armed forces in 2013 comprised 178,000 troops (less than half the 2009 total of 325,000) and heavily depended upon a core of 50,000, mainly, Alawi units. The strength of the NDF was reported in 2014 at possibly 100,000.125

The Syrian counter-revolution, although defending the power of a cross-sectarian ruling class of businessmen and security magnates, reached downward through these primarily sectarian militias. Militias were recruited not out of doctrinal difference but because much of 'Syria's local political, economic, tribal and religious elites had spent decades cultivating contacts in Damascus' garnering a stake in the regime that they were then required to defend. The constituency organised by these efforts at military repression of the uprising 'consisted of unemployed young men whose loyalty was guaranteed by privileged access to state resources and salaries paid by wealthy regime supporters'.126 The counter-revolutionary policy of a cross-sectarian elite, thus, produced sectarian effects because of its direction against a mass uprising – an uprising that therefore reflected the Sunni majority of the population. On its own, however, even sectarianism could not serve to mobilise enough men and materiel to fend off the revolutionary challenge. To succeed, the Syrian counter-revolution would require external aid, rendering the country a battleground between competing powers.

Bahrain

Limited to a few thousand royals, the Bahraini counter-revolution would never have succeeded. Broader layers of support were to be found in the – often intertwined – distinction between Sunni and Shi'a and between citizen and non-citizen. As in other Gulf states, most of the population consists of non-citizen workers, predominantly from South Asia. Bahraini citizenship, however, represents a more permeable boundary than that of other Gulf states: one of the main targets of the protests being the practice of *tajnis*, the alleged regime policy to naturalise Sunni non-citizens in order to decrease the Shi'a proportion of the citizenry. This policy was particularly effective in the security forces. Whereas thousands of Sunnis from other Arab states, such as Jordan, Syria or

Yemen – or even more distant states such as Pakistan – were offered naturalisation as part of their employment in the Bahraini police force, Bahraini Shi'a were required to provide a certificate of good conduct in order to join the police: the few who did so were often regarded locally as informants.127

Within the citizen population, accounts adopting the sectarian lens claim, around 70 per cent of Bahrainis are Shi'a and 30 per cent Sunni.128 Demonstrating the plasticity of such categories, although most Shi'a speak Arabic and claim a point of origin on the island itself (the 'Baharna'), a not insubstantial minority (the 'Ajam') identify with Persian origins, and a further small minority (the 'Huwala') of Sunnis are considered 'Persianized Arabs'. Rather than ancient doctrinal difference, these distinctions have their origins in British colonial policy and the 'sectarian lens' it laid over differing relationships between landlords, merchants, pearl-divers and peasants.129

Sectarianism lay upon and refracted a material basis. The Khalifas, thus, inherited the sectarian method of rule, if not the distinct religious beliefs and institutions that provide its raw material, from the British and combined it with the defence of their own status as the Sunni overlords of Shi'a agricultural producers. Coercive power under the British was devolved to (predominantly Sunni) landlords and their armed retinue, exercised with naked brutality against their (predominantly Shi'a) tenants. Sunni landlords, clients or members of the House of Khalifa, employed direct coercion to extract surplus from these cultivators by means of their fi*dayyun* or armed retinue.130 In the early 1920s, seeking to bring the Trucial state of Bahrain in line with newly acquired mandate territories in the region, the British forced upon the Khalifas a series of reforms to give the Shi'a peasantry equal legal status and render their overlords subject to general civil taxation. The most vigorous opponents of these reforms were the 'Khawalid' line of the Royal family, who would become, as we have seen, the most coherent and consistent counterrevolutionaries in 2011.131

Before the Iranian Revolution of 1979, nonetheless, the Khalifas were troubled not by the threat of politicised Shi'ism but of Arab nationalism and the anti-colonial Left. The widespread agitation of the 1950s against London's dominion and the even more radical strike at the Bahrain Arab Petroleum Company in 1965 followed the lead of Cairo, not of Najaf or Qom, reflecting the island's connection to the radicalism of the time.132 Neither religious distinction nor discrimination disappeared during this period: but these were subsumed beneath the wider logic of the Arab and global Cold Wars. Only with the Iranian Revolution of 1979 did sectarian discrimination become aligned with geopolitical contest and sectarianism in Bahrain harden into a governing system. This discrimination served to cement the Khalifas in power, to create a Shi'a community united by their experience of subordination, and to bind non-royal Sunnis to the former by means of fear of the latter. In 2002, the newly enthroned King Hamad conceded a new constitution in response to an uprising that foreshadowed that of 2011. Any hopes placed in the new king were proven illusory, however, as discriminatory practices against Shi'a and the undemocratic system they preserved continued.

These discriminatory practices extended across the public and private sectors: keeping Shi'a under-represented in state institutions, Sunnis over-represented, and members of the *Aal Khalifa* dominant in executive positions. In 2009, for example, 13 per cent of Sunni households had a member or relative employed by the security services: amongst Shi'a male respondents, the number was zero.133 Electoral districts were drawn to buttress an unrepresentative Sunni parliamentary majority. The 2010 elections for the forty-seat lower house resulted in a tally of twenty-two Sunni MPs and eighteen Shi'a. The appointed upper house retained a permanent Sunni majority.134 Although Shi'a did reach ministerial positions, they would never find themselves in charge of the 'sovereign' ministries: defence, interior or the premiership itself. Shi'a held 24 per cent of cabinet posts in 2011; non-Khalifa Sunnis 36 per cent and the Khalifas 40 per cent. In the Ministry of Interior, Shi'a held 10 per cent of the senior posts; Khalifas 35 per cent and non-Khalifa Sunnis 55 per cent. No Shi'a officer commanded a brigade of the armed forces – half of BDF brigadiers were Khalifas, who also occupied thirteen out of fourteen seats on the Supreme Defence Council. Khalifas occupied 27 per cent of leadership roles in government and state-owned enterprises; non-Khalifa Sunnis 46 per cent, non-Bahrainis 19 per cent and Shi'a only 8 per cent. No Shi'a occupied a post in the higher judiciary – 33 per cent of which were held by al-Khalifas, 58 per cent by other Sunnis and 9 per cent by non-Bahrainis.135

Beyond police violence and political under-representation, Al-Khalifa economic policies reinforced the pre-independence distribution of land and population between Shi'a tenants and Sunni landlords. Overcrowding and poor housing conditions affected Shi'a particularly, although not exclusively, and were easily contrasted with the real estate dealings of the royal family. The public sector, the largest employer in the country, skewed strongly towards the Sunni minority: Sunnis in 2009 had a 65.1 per cent chance of being a government employee: Shi'a a mere 41.7 per cent.136 Residential segregation ensued with Shi'a concentrated in poorly served villages-turned-suburbs of Manama. As in Syria, this geographic separation made possible the siege tactics and collective punishment that characterised the counterrevolution, since Shi'a areas could be specifically targeted. 137

This exclusion of and discrimination produced a political response. In the early 1980s, the 'Islamic Front', a group inspired by the Khomeinist victory in the Iranian revolution, mounted operations against Bahraini government buildings: apparently, the first and last time that the Islamic republic attempted any intervention in the kingdom. The Shi'a Iranian threat was subsequently invoked with great frequency by the Khalifas, without much supporting evidence. The Bahraini opposition contained Shi'a Islamists of two main trends, the 'line of the Imam', and analogues of the *da'wa* ('Call') party in Iraq. The most successful political party, Al-Wefaq, brought together these trends on broad reformist platform: seventeen out of eighteen Shi'a deputies in the 2010 lower house belonged to the group. Al-Wefaq sought not the *wilayat-al-faqih* but rather 'emphasise[d] the need for democratic and human rights, the equal distribution of wealth and social justice, as well as respect for Islamic ethics'.138 The less

compromising 'Al-Haq Movement for Liberties and Democracy' was founded in 2005 under the leadership of Hassan Mushayma to challenge the constitutional legitimacy of Khalifa rule following the reversal of 2002. Despite his portrayal as a would-be Imam Khomeini by the regime in 2011 – especially once al-Haq and others mounted their call for a republic – the movement crossed sectarian lines, including within its ranks Sunni clerics and Arab nationalists.139

As in Syria, part of the usefulness of sectarianism to the Khalifas lay not so much in its effect on the repressed Shi'a majority as on the Sunnis they sought to bind to their regime. Ibrahim Sharif, the only Sunni amongst twenty-one leaders of the 2011 protests to face trial and imprisonment, led appeals to Sunnis to join the movement and speak out against the injustices done to their Shi'a compatriots. Sunnis, including one *Sala*fi ex-army officer, who addressed the crowds at Pearl Roundabout, were arrested and forced to recant their words: chanting or displays of crosssectarian slogans were harshly punished by the police.140 Behind this reaction of the regime lay a distinction within the Sunni community. Whereas Shi'a, being disadvantaged because of their sect whatever their other circumstances of life, displayed a roughly uniform likelihood of participation in demonstrations, Sunni participation reflected a marked class divide – to the extent that one can read class in income surveys. The poorer a Sunni household considered itself to be, the likelier it was to have participated in a demonstration (in 2009): a 7 per cent likelihood amongst those who rated their economic situation 'very good'; 16 per cent amongst 'good'; 29 per cent amongst those who considered themselves 'poor'; and 45 per cent amongst the 'very poor'.141 No Sunni income group were as likely to protest, however, as even the wealthiest Shi'a.

Of course, participation in protest could equally refer to protests supporting the regime. At the same time as presenting a sectarian threat to Sunni life in Bahrain, echoed in state violence against protestors, sectarianism provided the mobilising material for counter-revolutionary mass movements. These formed three, by no means mutually exclusive, trends: the National Unity Gathering, the 'Fatih Youth union' and murkier groups associated with ex-*mukhabarat* officers such as Adil Filayfil. These movements operated outside of the two recognised political 'societies' – one associated with the Muslim Brotherhood and the other with *sala*fi trends – that held most support in Parliament.

The case of the 'National Unity Gathering' (*tajammu' al-wahda al-wataniyya*) promoted an alternative protest to the Pearl Roundabout, gathering at the Al-Fateh mosque on the 21st of February 2011.142 The Ministry of Interior, which neither required a permit of the protestors nor attempted to disperse them, claimed a figure of 400,000 participants, with other observers claiming 120,000. The NUG gathered again at the Fateh mosque on the 2nd of March, with the Ministry of Interior claiming a similar number of participants: on the 5th of March, a 'human chain' was formed from the Al-Fateh mosque to the Pearl Roundabout, intended to symbolise the 'national unity' threatened by the crisis.143

The NUG presented itself as an alternative, rather than just an antagonist to the Pearl Roundabout occupation – especially as the demands of the latter became more radical and republican. Like the Pearl Roundabout revolutionaries, the NUG also 'set a list of social-economic demands, including housing and health': demands left unmet once the rule of the Khalifas was once more secure.144 The first public statement of the group, read to the crowd by Al-Mahmood, described it as a 'group of public and religious figures' offering a 'platform for those in society who have no political or institutional affiliation'. This careful appeal to the politically inactive was followed by a sterner set of red lines: affirming the 'legitimacy of the existing regime' and asserting that the 'maintenance of stability in the country is not negotiable'. Directly addressing the 'Shi'a of Bahrain', the NUG 'extends its hands' to the Pearl Roundabout protestors, considered a sub-set of the former.145 The NUG, like the government in whose name it called for unity, appeared to believe that the reason for the revolt lay in the Shi'ism of the majority of Bahrain's population.

The NUG offered a link between Khalifa counter-revolution from above and popular counter-revolution from below, cemented by a common Sunni identity. Prime Minister Khalifa Bin Salman, leading hardliner amongst the counter-revolutionaries, praised the 'honourable mobilisation' of 'loyal citizens...defending their country against subversive conspiracies'.146 The NUG had petered out by the parliamentary elections of 2014, but not before having an appreciable counterrevolutionary effect: '[l]arge pro-government rallies and campaigns of armed violence against Shi'i demonstrations aimed to slow the momentum of the uprising'.147 On the fringes of the popular Sunni mobilisation, violence persisted after the uprising – its perpetrators were to be found both in and out of uniform. In December of 2012, members of Adil Filayfil's 'military society' attacked a Shi'a religious procession, accusing the celebrants of chanting disloyal slogans.148

Such groups as Filayfil's operated in a broader 'sect-sex-police nexus', to borrow Frances Hasso's term. Combining different elements seen in both the Egyptian and Syrian counter-revolutions, the Khalifa regime and its media supporters presented the Pearl Roundabout occupation as a site of both unbridled sexual licence and Iranian theocratic influence. Pro-regime discourse dubbed the Pearl Roundabout '*al-mut'a* or 'temporary marriage' roundabout'. As in Syria, the implication that female detainees were subject to sexual assault by the security services utilised existing familial and patriarchal norms to discourage female participation in the protests.149

Parallels with Syria were also to be found in the intertwining of online and offline forms of counter-revolution. Here, the narratives shared a form but inverted content. The Syrian regime cast its opponents as the Jihadist pawns of a Zionist-Western conspiracy against the 'axis of resistance' linking Tehran, Damascus and Hizballah. The Khalifas and their partisans portrayed the Bahraini uprising as the work of an Iranian-Shi'a conspiracy amongst the latter. Such counter-revolutionary thinking cascaded through a Sunni Islamist milieu otherwise generally supportive of the revolutions: a notable example being the declaration of Yusuf al-Qaradhawi that the Bahraini uprising was a 'sectarian' event.150 As in Syria, social media offered a conduit for this form

of sectarian counterrevolution – one identified in particular with the Twitter account 'Hareghum' ('He who Burns Them' i.e. the protestors), which identified the names and whereabouts of leading revolutionaries.151 As well as the activities of such accounts, the surveillance opportunities offered by social media (with the assistance of 'Western PR and security firms') further strengthened the Bahraini counter-revolution.152

The regime itself accused medical staff at the Salmaniya Medical Centre, adjacent to the Pearl Roundabout, of 'discrimination' against naturalised Sunnis – a claim vigorously denied by the accused medics.153 Of the sixty individuals who reported torture allegations to the BICI report – not all of them Shi'a – 26 reported being subject to sectarian insults.154 Reports of sectarian abuse during arrests were also common. In the spring of 2011, the Bahraini government demolished thirty-eight Shi'a mosques.155 Such actions the BICI report registers as police or government misconduct rather than sectarian violence, reserving the latter term for clashes that broke out in the predominantly Shi'a district of Hamad at the beginning of March 2011. The Commission received 102 complaints from Sunnis, alleging physical assaults, and 120 verbal assaults targeting them because of their religion: although several of these were second-hand reports of what they believed had happened to others.156 No Sunnis reported being subject to sectarian abuse by the police or security forces. In 2013, Crown Prince Salman al-Khalifa was filmed telling a police officer – recently acquitted of torturing medics – that '[t]hese [anti-torture] laws cannot be applied to you. No one can touch this bond...We are one body'.157

If Bahraini sectarianism was more direct than the Syrian version – binding Sunni counter-revolution from below to an equally Sunni, rather than cross-sectarian elite – it played a similar role in suppressing the revolt of 2011. Likewise, the Khalifas could not rely upon the mixture of sectarianism and coercion to provide a secure anchoring for their counter-revolution. They, too, had to turn to outside intervention to reverse the revolutionary movement.

Counter-Revolution from Without

Reliant on narrower bases and more intensely violent tactics for their counter-revolutions, the Syrian and Bahraini regimes found themselves more dependent on external support than their Egyptian or Tunisian counterparts. The Syrian and Bahraini cases stand out as examples of externally backed counter-revolution in the uprisings of 2011. Tunisia and Egypt witnessed no military intervention: Libya (where such intervention crucially supported the fall of Gaddafi) and Yemen, by contrast, became the battlegrounds of competing powers after the respective fall of the incumbent dictators in 2011. Only in Syria and Bahrain did direct external intervention preserve the existing regimes – although such intervention was not the only form active in the two revolutions, especially in Syria.

Syria and Bahrain, therefore, offer test cases for the changing relationship between counter-revolution and the international. As discussed in chapter 2, revolutionary crises have always been as much threats to international as domestic orders: revolutions are 'intersocietal' processes from the beginning.158 On the one hand, the competitive pres-

sure of an anarchic states system – in classic readings of the origins of social revolutions – provides both the proximate spur to revolutionary crisis in the form of war or fiscal collapse and the source of ideas, models and methods of social change.159 On the other, the threat posed to sovereign order everywhere by revolutionary transformation anywhere provokes counter-revolutionary reaction from outside powers – hence the formation of counter-revolutionary alliances, direct intervention, containment and war and with which revolutions are met on the regional and international stage.

The late twentieth and early twenty-first century appeared to witness a reversal of this logic: limited political revolutions being encouraged, welcomed – even, in some views, fomented – by a global liberal world order under US dominance. This was the pattern to which the Arab revolutions of 2011 were initially assimilated and the lens through which both opponents and supporters of 'regime change' saw the revolutions, particularly in historic opponents of the United States such as Syria.160 The contrasting cases of Bahrain and Syria demonstrate how outmoded such assumptions were. In Bahrain, a US ally and site of the Naval Central Command and Fifth Fleet, the uprising was crushed with the aid of Saudi Arabia and the GCC (also US allies) without any evident compunction in Washington. In Syria, the revolution represented an indigenous uprising rather than an external attempt at 'regime change': US direct intervention when it came was overwhelmingly targeted at ISIS, not Assad. US intervention into the armed rebellion lagged behind that of Qatar, Turkey and Saudi Arabia and was aimed at managing rather than supporting the ambitions of these states. Far more consequential were the directly counter-revolutionary interventions of Russia and Iran. These, combined with the Saudi/GCC intervention in Bahrain, re-established the principle that revolutionary uprisings in the region would face international hostility, not support.

Syria

The intervention of outside powers in the Syrian civil war is a familiar story – so much so that the history of the original uprising has been obscured by the narrative of a 'proxy war'. By far, the most extensive interventions, however, were made by the regime's counterrevolutionary allies: Iran, the Lebanese Hizballah, and Russia. Next came the sponsors of various competing fractions of the armed opposition: Qatar and Turkey, Saudia Arabia and the other GCC states. Last in order of both contribution and strategic importance were the United States and its allies which, following a brief flirtation with parts of the armed opposition between 2012 and 2014, turned to the Kurdish PYD as their most reliable interlocutors.161

Given the wide prevalence of the belief that the United States was responsible for a 'regime change' war in Syria from 2011, this claim bears more substantiation.162 The United States launched two sets of air strikes – all under President Trump more than six years after the uprising began – against regime targets. These followed the chemical attacks in Khan Sheikhoun in 2017 and Douma in 2018. A total of 162 missiles across the two attacks (with the UK and France) killed nine Syrian servicemen.163 By contrast, the United States launched 19,890 strikes against (presumed) ISIS targets in

Syria between 2014 and 2021.164 At least 39,000 Russian air strikes (against all Syrian opposition forces and areas) were carried out between 2015 and 2018.165

Russia, thus, deployed 240 times more firepower in defence of the regime than the United States ever used against it. The United States itself deployed 122 times more firepower against ISIS than against any regime targets. The United States mandated $500 million for its 'trainand-equip' programme – discussed later – also designed to fight ISIS.166 The putative commander of the force being told, 'You should not shoot a bullet against the regime'.167 In the end, 54 men were sent back into Syria under the auspices of 'Division 30' in July 2015: they were soon attacked and routed by Nusra forces taking revenge for a US air strike. The separate 'vetting' programme was mainly funded by Gulf countries, such as Saudi Arabia. 168 Official US supplies were limited to non-lethal equipment, such as the $123 million sent in 2013.169 The UN special envoy on Syria, Steffan Da Mistura, estimated Iranian expenditure in Syria at $6 billion per year, while the post-2015 intervention cost Russia

$4 million per day.170 Iran (a much poorer country) risked annually more than ten times the US total, while Russia would burn through the same amount in less than six months. By any measure, the Russian and Iranian commitment to intervention in Syria greatly outweighed that of the United States (the most involved of the Western powers). To present US policy in Syria as an equivalent of the actual regime change war fought in Iraq in the previous decade is simply to disregard the historical record.

Nonetheless, Washington did welcome the possibility that a historic enemy of Israel and ally of Iran might be toppled – if not the regime as a whole. Facing brutal repression and seeing the Libyan example, much of the Syrian opposition in 2012 also changed their previous policy: pegging their hopes on a NATO intervention that would never come.171 This was despite the general secretary of the latter organisation 'completely rul [ing] that out'.172 The uprising did provoke a debate within the Obama administration between a minority of pro-intervention figures (such as Susan Rice and Hilary Clinton) and the far warier Joint Chiefs of Staff and Department of Defense, with Obama favouring the latter. '[I]t's sad that Syrians are dying', as one US official said, 'but as long as it stays within Syria I don't see how that impacts on US national security'.173

As a waning but still important imperial power, however, the United States still required a Syria policy. The uprising itself, contrary to its depiction in pro-regime media, had nothing to do with the US and initial opposition statements took an anti-interventionist line. Of greater concern to Washington was the need to shape the consequences of the uprising, the repression against it and subsequent civil war. Not until a year after the first protests was the so-called Friends of Syria group inaugurated at which the opposition Syrian National Coalition was recognised as 'a' – not 'the' – legitimate representative of Syrians seeking peaceful democratic change'. The United States was willing to sponsor the formation of a Syrian opposition leadership but not to the extent of, for example, paying to host their conferences.174 As Gulf states and Turkey, as well as private donations, exerted increasing influence over the external

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opposition and the militarisation of the revolution, US policy sought to manage the interventions of others.

Covert US operations towards this end began in 2013, two years after the uprising began and more than a year after even the pitched battles for Homs. Obama rejected a similar programme twice in 2012.175 'Timber Sycamore' aimed not to increase weapons supply – which were already coming in from Gulf sources – but to 'try to gain control' of it.176 The programme 'vetted' FSA units to receive materiel through one site in Jordan and one in Turkey. The United States prevented heavier weapons and particularly anti-aircraft MANPADS from reaching the Syrian rebels. Anti-tank missiles were provided to seventy groups, which had to provide shell-casings and film of their use. One FSA commander summed up the function of the Amman-based MOC as 'we get enough to keep going but not to win'.177 These measures contrast starkly with the air support given to the YPG and its allies, to which the United States made a strategic turn in the latter part of the Obama administration.

Following the chemical attacks in Ghouta in August 2013, US air strikes seemed likely. They were averted by the Russian acceptance of US Secretary of State John Kerry' suggestion – previously discussed by Putin and Obama – that the Assad regime verify the transfer or destruction of its chemical weapons.178 The US' foremost ally in the region, Israel, had itself begun carrying out air strikes on Syrian targets more than six months earlier – directed not against the regime itself but at the Hizballah troops supporting it.179 Such air strikes aided the regime's claim to Arab nationalist legitimacy, notwithstanding the prevailing view in Tel Aviv that Assad represented a known quantity and that a prolonged war draining Iran, Hizballah and Sunni Islamists was a not unwelcome development.180 A similar position was also shared amongst some of Obama's national security advisors.181

Much more important on the opposition side were the efforts of the regional powers Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey, and private donations from the Gulf. These states pursued their own policies to which the United States had to react and were riven by rivalries generated by their differing attitude to the regional revolutions. Turkey and Qatar, and other Gulf states, had before 2011 been moving closer to the Assad regime. Although far from reaching the level of regional integration witnessed in Egypt, for example, Bashar's mid-2000s financial liberalisation 'enhanced the regime's access to growing pools of investment capital in the Gulf'.182 The Greater Arab Free Trade Area and customs agreements with both Turkey and Iran contributed to a 34 per cent expansion of exports and 62 per cent expansion of imports between 2005 and 2010.183 Turkey, under the AKP, made rehabilitating relations with Syria one of the lynchpins of its foreign policy. Trade between the two trebled between 2006 and 2010 from $796 million to $2.5 billion – Erdogan and Assad even took to holidaying together.184 The Qatari ruling family likewise improved its relationships, diplomatic, economic and personal with Damascus.185

The revolutionary uprisings split this relationship apart. Three broad camps emerged in the region: the two opposed but outright counter-revolutionary alliances

of Saudi Arabia and the UAE on one side, Iran and Russia on the other, and the promoters of political revolution but social counter-revolution embodied in the Muslim Brotherhood and supported by Ankara and Doha. For the Saudis, the Syrian revolution presented a contradictory opportunity. Saudi funds and patronage flowed to those in the Syrian opposition 'that would help it achieve its regional goals with little regard to any commitment to popular democracy'.186 The Saudis certainly had no interest in encouraging their long-standing opponents in the Muslim Brotherhood nor in encouraging the idea that undemocratic regimes should be easily overthrown by their citizens. Their efforts were turned towards the former officers in the FSA, hoping to preserve as in Yemen a fraction of the old regime without Assad. Following the evident disorientation of the nonIslamist opposition in 2013, the Saudis made Salafist elements such as the 'Army of Islam' their favoured clients.187 Private funding and satellite TV – saturated with sectarian preaching that downplayed the cross-sectarian and popular aspects of the uprising – encouraged the most conservative and sectarian armed groups.188

Qatar and Turkey were less cautious. The most sincerely committed of the outside powers to the actual overthrow of the regime, they promoted first their allies in the – largely exiled – Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and then armed Qutbist factions such as Ahrar al-Sham. These lines of competition traversed the Syrian exile opposition sponsored by Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Given the impossibility of operating securely within Syria, the establishment of an exile opposition (a position in which millions of Syrians would find themselves as the war wore on) was probably inevitable. Nonetheless, the disconnection between the politicians in the hotels of Istanbul and Doha and the actual revolutionaries on the ground could only work to hamper the latter, as the former became more accountable to their external sponsors than to the internal revolutionary movement.189

Qatar encouraged the predominance of MB politicians and associated groups in the exile opposition. The long years post-Hama repression – during which 'Law 49' rendered membership of the organisation a capital offence – had left the Syrian MB a largely external force who were taken as unawares by the uprising as anyone else.190 MB supporters participated in, and often led, the local demonstrations but, as in Egypt, the organisation as such only swung behind the movement once it was in train with a declaration of support six weeks after the first demonstrations.191 The Brotherhood also had the advantage of a coherent and experienced international political network. When the Syrian National Council was founded in the autumn of 2011, the MB held around a quarter of the organisation's seats and key positions, including the vice presidency and the 'Relief and Development Bureau' through which funds could be directed inside Syria.192 Qatar also provided much of the funding for the SNC, hosted in Istanbul, either through direct transfers or the emirate's new ally post-Gaddafi Libya.193

The wider regional division between Qatar, Turkey and the Muslim Brotherhood, on the one hand, and Saudi Arabia and the GCC, on the other, could not be contained for

long. In the spring of 2013, as the Saudi and GCC-backed counter-revolution unfolded in Egypt, the consequences were soon felt in the Syrian exile opposition. The SNC had itself been subsumed into the larger 'Syrian Opposition Coalition' (SOC) six months earlier, partly as a means of diluting Brotherhood influence.194 The initial president of the Coalition, the widely respected cleric Moaz al-Khatib, attempted to pursue an independent line that soon met with the disfavour of both sets of sponsors: Al-Khatib resigned, to be replaced by a lesser-known figure supported by Qatar and the MB, Ghassan Hitto. Hitto himself was not to last long, however, as following a visit to Riyadh in May 2013, the SOC was expanded by 54 new members 'almost all Saudi Arabia's allies'. A new executive was elected a week after the coup in Cairo, placing Saudi ally Ahmad Jerba at the head of the SOC.195

These manoeuvres represented the triumph of the counterrevolutionary axis head-quartered in Riyadh. Yet the exile opposition itself was, in any case, losing what influence it had inside Syria as its very sponsors typically bypassed the SNC and SOC to foster military formations directly. By the middle of 2012, opposition fighters claimed, 15 per cent of their weaponry was externally provided – although contrary to the notion of a regime change conspiracy, this would still leave the vast majority coming from Syrian (presumably defecting regime) forces. Private Gulf sources – such as the Kuwait-based Popular Commission to Support the Syrian People, which apparently donated $400,000 to Ahrar al-Sham – contributed heavily to the increasing Islamist influence in the armed opposition.196

Turkey also turned to Brotherhood-aligned armed factions and clients, Ankara having had its initial attempts at mediation rebuffed by Assad.

Turkey was one of the sites of the 'Operations Centers' from which weaponry was funnelled – once vetted by US intelligence – to opposition battalions. This gave Turkey significant influence over the northern front of the war, in which Ankara unquestionably used to pursue – probably alone amongst all of the opposition's backers – the overthrow of the regime. The development of the Kurdish autonomous cantons, and the Russian intervention, changed the Turkish calculus, however. After the retreat of ISIS in 2014, Turkey's sole strategic objective became the crushing of these cantons, illustrated by the Turkish invasion and occupation of the area in 2019 using part former elements of the FSA and armed opposition as proxy fighters.

These efforts paled beside those of Russia, Iran and its militia allies – such as Hizballah. These actors deployed diplomatic, financial and military means to bolster the regime and proved decisive in the victory of the counter-revolution. Although Hizballah had grown out of the Iranian revolution, the alliance between Tehran and Moscow was by no means self-evident. Where Iran still presented itself as the pivot of the 'axis of resistance' to Zionism and American imperialism, Russia cultivated relationships with US allies such as Israel (and indeed Saudi Arabia.) Neither could afford, however, the example of a successful uprising against the regime of a long-standing ally. The leadership of the Islamic Republic, having faced an uprising in its own cities in 2009, took a dim view of similar examples – the initial welcome extended

by Tehran to the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, portraying them as variants of the 1979 revolution, turned quickly to accusations of foreign conspiracy once they spread to Syria. An initial rapprochement between Mohammed Morsi as the Muslim Brotherhood president of Egypt and Mahmoud Ahamdinejad as the prime minister of the Islamic republic was cut short by the 2013 counter-revolutionary coup in Egypt. Russia – and most especially President Vladimir Putin – conceived of the long wave of postCold War revolutions as instance after instance of US-led regime change that might reach Moscow itself.197 Iran and Russia, therefore, pursued the mirror image of Saudi Arabia's counter-revolutionary policy: counter-revolution *a l'outrance*, attempting to re-establish the barriers of fear torn down by the uprisings, rather than attempting to divert them into favourable political reform as Qatar and Turkey did.

At first, Iran provided the foremost contribution to preserving the Syrian regime. Its collapse would threaten Iranian supply lines to Hizballah in Lebanon. Iran's contribution was at first financial and material. Iran's alleged $6bn annual spending has already been noted: Tehran also extended $4.6bn credit line to cover Syria's spiralling food and fuel import bill as the regime lost control of grain and oil-producing areas in the North-East. Iran became Syria's largest trading partner, with trade trebling from $300 billion in 2011 to reach $1billion in 2014.198

Where Iran made proportionately the largest financial backing to the Syrian counter-revolution, Tehran's direct military intervention was equally important. This intervention was conducted mainly through the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps under and the re-organisation of the regime war effort around more reliable and better-trained militias, both Syrian and foreign. The IRGC moulded and trained the militias of the NDF into more formidable fighting force than the Syrian Arab Army, reduced to perhaps 70,000–80,000 by 2015.199

Although the NDF consisted of Syrian fighters, Iran further mobilised largely Shi'a militias from across the region (and even as far afield as Afghanistan) to back up the regime. The most prominent of these was, of course, Hizballah. The Lebanese 'Party of God' had long relied on Damascus as its immediate ally and land bridge to its Iranian sponsor in any conflagration with Israel. The organisation was, therefore, prepared to sacrifice its hard-won reputation amongst a wider (mainly Sunni) Arab public by backing Assad to the hilt. The most battlehardened and well-trained Arab fighting force in the region, Hizballah's contribution was invaluable, especially at the battle of Qusayr in the summer of 2013.200 Hizballah's 4,000–5,000 troops were supplemented by Iraqi and then (when the latter were redeployed to fight ISIS in Iraq in 2014) Afghan Shi'a militias amounting to a further 3,000–4,000 men.201 The Iranian intervention and its reliance upon Shi'a militias undoubtedly furthered the sectarianisation of the conflict and of the wider region: but it derived from Iran's inability to muster forces to aid its embattled ally on any other basis.202

By far the most consequential outside actor, on the regime or any other side, however, was not a Muslim power at all but Russia. Moscow's aerial campaign from 2015 effectively saved Assad. The Syrian counterrevolution offered Russia the opportunity

to take up the position usually occupied by the US: guarantor of an authoritarian regime who, therefore, entered into the strategic calculations of all other interested parties.203

Russia's intervention did not begin, however, with an all-out military campaign. Between 2011 and 2015, Moscow mostly restricted its policy to financial and diplomatic support, such as printing the Syrian currency.204 A UNSC veto member, Russia was extended kind of diplomatic protection to Damascus that the US was accustomed to offering Israel. Between 2011 and 2020, Russia used its UNSC veto 19 times on resolutions related to Syria.205

S-300 anti-aircraft defences were offered to Damascus when US air strikes seemed likely in 2013, then withdrawn following Israeli objections. The use of Russian weaponry in Syria acted as an advertising campaign for the country's arms manufacturers, increasing exports by perhaps as much as $6–7 billion in addition to the $4 billion already contracted by the Syrian regime.

The aerial campaign mounted by Russia in 2015 went far beyond mere arms exports, however. In the late summer of 2015, a redoubled IranianRussian campaign, following a series of regime setbacks on the Northern and Southern fronts, was agreed at the highest levels between supreme leader Khamenei and Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov. On the 26th of August 2015, a Russo-Syrian agreement provided for the free use of the Khmeimim base by Russian forces, followed by the despatch of 28 planes, 2,000 personnel and the Russian Black Sea fleet. On the 30th of September, a Russian general reportedly entered the US embassy in Baghdad with a terse message: 'We launch Syria strikes in one hour. Stay out of the way'.206

At the high point of US hegemony and the dreams of liberal empire a mere decade prior, the issuing – much less the acceptance – of such an injunction would have been unthinkable. Yet both issued and accepted it was. As noted above, between 2015 and 2019, Russia launched 39,000 air strikes with credible reports of 7,000 civilian deaths – although the Russian military claimed no civilians were killed at all by their munitions.207 Russian air power was instrumental in the fall of eastern Aleppo to regime forces in 2016. By August 2018, 63,012 Russian servicemen had served in Syria.208 By that point, with command of the skies and 'mercenaries' on the ground, Russia had established itself as the indispensable outside power in Syria.

Small wonder then that, far from continuing the policy of regime change pioneered by the Bush administration in Iraq, Washington played next to no role in attempts to resolve the Syrian conflict after 2013. Military superiority enabled Russia to extend the role it had played in avoiding US air strikes in the aftermath of the chemical attacks in 2013. Two rounds of talks in Geneva proved fruitless. It was only under Russian hegemony and Turkish interlocution that the 'Astana process' in 2017 produced local ceasefires. The core principle of these ceasefires was, however, regime and Russian hegemony, confirming rather than undoing the military counter-revolution that had brought them about.

Confined within Syrian borders, it is unlikely that the regime could have achieved the remarkable success it did in surviving the best part of a decade of revolution and civil war, albeit in transformed form. Sectarianism – its material underpinnings lying in the pre-2011 political economy of – provided the adhesive for the counter-revolution from above and below. The comparatively narrow base of support for a cross-sectarian economic and security elite rendered this strategy compatible only with a risky military response to the uprising. Fortunately for the Syrian counter-revolution, it was able to draw upon the support of an axis of Russia, Iran and their regional sub-state allies – a dynamic of competitive counter-revolution with Qatar, Turkey, and the GCC that left the regime in place but presiding over a ruin.

Bahrain

Where the competitive forms of international counter-revolution operating in Syria demonstrated one way in which the era of 'regime change' and US predominance had passed, the swift and single counterrevolutionary intervention in Bahrain illustrated another. The corollary of the claim that anti-US alignment protects regimes against democratising mass uprisings is that alliance with the US renders regimes more vulnerable to such uprisings. Yet in the case of Bahrain, the effective support of Washington outweighed any temporary criticism – in any case largely consisting of equivocal calls for reform and statements of equivalence between protesters and regime. Even the calls for 'orderly transition' within the overall framework of maintaining the regime, which emanated from the Obama administration towards Cairo once the fate of Mubarak was clear, found no equivalent in the Gulf. Rather than the United States, the main force of the counter-revolution came from the 'Peninsula Shield Force' mustered by Saudi Arabia its GCC allies. This independent, if US-sanctioned, action reflected the new understanding in Riyadh and Abu Dhabi that their former protector could not be counted on to see off the threat of revolutionary overthrow. The consequence of this new freedom of action was even greater tension with Iran, refracted through the sectarian lens that depicted the Bahraini uprising as the work of Khamenei's agents. As in Syria and Egypt, the international played as significant a discursive as material counter-revolutionary role with the partisans of the Khalifas (effectively Saudi clients), making outsized claims of Bahraini sovereignty against an imagined Shi'a conspiracy that supposedly embraced the majority of the kingdom's population.

The alliance of the GCC and the Khalifas with the United States did not advance the cause of the uprising. Since the establishment of the US naval base in Bahrain in 1975 – replacing the Royal Navy – Washington had acquired an interest in maintaining the ruling house in power.209 By 2011, the base housed thousands of US personnel and served as the hub for American forces, following the withdrawal of most troops from Iraq. The tone of Washington's response to the Bahraini uprising, therefore, differed markedly to that in Egypt, let alone in Syria: an assistant secretary of state on 15th of February 2011 described the administration as 'very concerned' but emphasised that 'all parties' ought to 'exercise restraint and refrain from violence'.210 The strongest statement to emerge from the White House came in late February when Obama declared

that only 'respecting the universal rights of the Bahraini people' through 'reforms that meet the aspirations of Bahrain' would ensure the stability of the kingdom.211 In personal conversations with the King, however, Obama reassured the monarch that the United States remained a 'long-standing partner of Bahrain', while Secretary of Defense Robert Gates pronounced himself, 'convinced' that the Khalifas were 'serious about real reform' after a visit to Manama.

Despite the absence of such serious reform, US rhetoric became, if anything, more partial towards the Khalifas after the Saudi intervention of March 2011. Although secretary of state Clinton found the intervention 'alarming' and a source of 'regret', she issued no condemnation of it but rather gestured towards 'increasing reports of sectarian violence and provocative acts by all groups'. Clinton followed up these remarks a month later with an affirmation of the 'decades-long' BahrainiAmerican friendship 'that we expect to continue long into the future'.212 When President Obama made remarks critical of the Khalifas and GCC, these were leavened with the credence given to the conspiratorial ideas that Iran 'tried to take advantage of the turmoil' in Bahrain.213 In practice, the US' relationship with the Khalifas continued unperturbed, and within a year of the uprising the administration was investing a further $500 million in the kingdom and making creative use of accounting regulations to continue arms sales.214

The UK, as the former colonial power, had also preserved its links to the Khalifas after withdrawing from the island in 1971. At the peak of the revolutionary upsurge in 2011, David Cameron, the British Prime Minister, told the Kuwaiti National Assembly that 'whenever and wherever violence is used against peaceful demonstrators, we must not hesitate to condemn it'.215 These remarks might have been interpreted to refer to Bahrain as much as to Egypt or Tunisia, but the substance of British policy lay in supporting the Khalifas. British expertise was particularly valuable in training the Bahraini officers responsible for the repression – continuing a long tradition in Bahrain inaugurated by Ian Henderson, the Scottish colonial officer who transferred his experience in colonial Kenya to the founding of the Bahraini *mukhabarat.* 'Northern Ireland Co-operation', a quasi-state body, and the 'Causeway Institute', a company owned by then democratic unionist MP Jeffery Donaldson, trained Bahraini police and prison guards while on a reciprocal visit to Belfast, the Police Service of Northern Ireland instructed Bahraini officers 'on community intelligence gathering and how to use dogs and water cannon'.216 The links were not limited to British companies; however, the former chief of Miami police was also hired to provide expertise in repressing demonstrations: the elite Bahrain 'Special Security Forces Command' having already been trained by the US military.217

The UK's contribution to the Bahraini counter-revolution – confirmed with the signing of a defence agreement between the two kingdoms in 2012 leading to the re-establishment of a Royal Navy base – was especially praised by the Prime Minister Crown Prince Salman as standing 'head and shoulders above all others'. British and US public relations firms received $2 million to bolster the image of the Khalifas and undermine that of their opponents. The notion that the Bahraini uprising represented

in some sense an outgrowth of Iranian policy, despite the absence of any evidence to support such a claim, seems to have been held by Western diplomats as much as PR men, however. The British ambassador to Bahrain was 'keen to stress Iranian involvement' while Foreign and Commonwealth Office parliamentary submissions hinted at 'Iran and other foreign actors...exploiting the political and propaganda opportunities offered by continuing unrest in Bahrain'.218

The United States and the UK were supporting powers in the Bahraini counter-revolution, however. The main source of the operation to crush the island revolt came from neighbouring Saudi Arabia. This regional counter-revolution was spearheaded by the troops of the 'Peninsula Shield Force' deployed over the causeway from Saudi Arabia on the 14th of March 2011. Scant days before this column of 1,000 Saudi troops and 500 Emirati police crossed the King Fahd bridge, the UN Security Council had authorised another foreign intervention into the Arab uprisings, directed against the Gaddafi regime in Libya: the impression of *quid pro quo*, with the GCC's suppression of a revolutionary uprising in the Gulf compensated for by Western support of one in North Africa, was difficult to avoid. A 'Peninsula Shield' force itself had a long counter-revolutionary history, having originally been established in1984 to unite the GCC in the face of the Iranian Revolution of five years before, but, in effect, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi were using the name for a new operation. Thus, Kuwait and Qatar declined to contribute to the force at its inception, which consisted only of Saudi and Emirati contingents under Saudi command.

Bahrain was the only site in which Saudi and other Gulf troops directly encountered one of the revolutionary movements of 2011. Elsewhere, the counter-revolutionary influence of the GCC was exercised through financial means or intervention by air or by client forces in the civil wars – such as in Syria, Libya or Yemen – that emerged from the revolutions. The choice of direct intervention reflected the geographical and political proximity of Bahrain to Saudi Arabia, or rather between the two ruling houses of the Sauds and Khalifas. The Sauds operated as effective 'suzerains' of the Khalifas: in the previous *intifada* of the 1990s, Saudi Arabia had increased the share of oil reserves available to Bahrain from the shared Abu Safah field. In the 1970s, after the British withdrawal, Riyadh provided both financial aid and troops for the Bahrain Defence Force in order to forestall the nascent parliamentary experiment on the island.219 Any instance of democratic governance in the immediate neighbourhood posed a threat to Riyadh's autocratic order. This threat was redoubled by the prospect of an empowered Shi'a majority in Bahrain, who shared a cultural and historical background with their co-religionists (15–20 per cent of the Saudi population) across the causeway.220 Demonstrations in the predominantly Shi'a eastern province of Saudi Arabia were brutally suppressed in 2011 and 2012 and the charismatic Shi'a Imam Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr arrested and later executed.221 The Saudis formed an alliance within the Bahraini ruling family, supporting the hardline position of the Prime Minister – and his Khawalid allies – against the King and ensured that the repressive counterrevolutionary policy

mandated by Riyadh was carried out.222 The Saudi-led counter-revolution in Bahrain was thus simultaneously 'domestic', 'regional' and 'international'.

Contrary to claims that GCC forces played a secondary role in the repression of the uprising, because the dispersal of the occupation of Pearl Roundabout on the 17th of March was largely the work of Bahraini security forces, Peninsula Shield marked the turning point in both the Bahraini and wider Arab counter-revolutions. The presence of the GCC troops maintaining order elsewhere allowed Bahraini forces to form the vanguard of the assault on the roundabout, thus avoiding the unwelcome symbolism of Saudis and Emiratis attacking Bahrainis in their own country. Nonetheless, it should be recalled that most of the Bahraini security service personnel themselves hailed from predominantly Sunni states such as Jordan or Pakistan, being offered naturalisation as a condition of their employment. Shortly after the uprising, the Pakistani foreign minister claimed that 10,000 of the country's nationals served in Bahrain's security services: estimates of the number of Jordanians serving in the Bahraini police apparatus – they often served as interrogators – varied from 499 to 2,500.223 Mistreatment at the hands of foreign-born policemen forms a common theme in the memoirs of Bahraini dissidents. The Peninsula Shield force was bolstered by a further 3,500 members of the Emirati and Saudi security forces between 2011 and

2014.224 An Emirati policeman was killed in the Bahraini village of Daih in 2014, demonstrating that such forces were in operation in municipal areas.225

The reason that the Khalifas called in the Peninsula Shield Force was, as we have seen, that they were unable to govern the country on their own account. Force of numbers precluded them from overcoming the revolutionary challenge: even if the GCC troops did not physically engage with Bahraini protestors, they freed up the Bahraini Defence Force and Ministry of Interior to do so. The groundwork for the Peninsula Shield intervention had been lain in direct response to the threat of revolution in the region. After the overthrow of Mubarak, the GCC convened an extraordinary meeting in Bahrain on the 17th of February – at the beginning of the uprising – and pledged to 'support Bahrain financially, politically, and militarily'.226 In securing Bahrain against the revolutionary uprising, the Saudis had prevented a repeat of the recent setback in Cairo with the deposition of Mubarak – except the feared outcome was not the democratic election of a Muslim Brotherhood administration but the fall of Bahrain under Iranian influence. The GCC intervention in Bahrain became the chief site of the counter-revolutionary sectarianisation of the region as – in an inverted version of the rhetoric of the Assad regime in Syria – the revolution accused, as noted earlier, of being a sectarian conspiracy masterminded from Tehran. A cross-sectarian opposition to the regional hegemony of the Sauds, as glimpsed in the Bahraini uprising, was a mortal threat avoided by reinforcing the division between Sunni and Shi'a.227 The Saudi intervention formed part of this strategy, which would produce its own dynamic of sectarianism from below – particularly fostered on social media.228

Propaganda aside, Riyadh faced no external challengers or competitors to its counter-revolution in Bahrain. The Iranian response was limited to rhetoric and that

of Qatar – associated elsewhere with supporting bounded political revolutions – to allowing the production of an Al-Jazeera documentary narrating the uprising.229 The intervention laid the basis for the hardening of the GCC around a Saudi-UAE counterrevolutionary axis of which the Khalifas became the most vigorously antiShi'a appendage. There were even proposals at the GCC to merge Bahrain into Saudi Arabia.230 This axis, directed against both Qatar and Iran, would manage the subsequent interventions in Libya and Yemen. The solidification of this counter-revolutionary alliance would then shift the architecture of regional conflict as a whole by drawing closer to the United States and Israel. Bahrain would form the vanguard of normalisation with the latter in the 'Abraham Accords' of 2020.

Conclusion

Syria and Bahrain – the only two states in which the rulers 2011 survived in power throughout the revolutionary upheaval – witnessed the most extensive sectarianisation and external intervention of any of the Arab uprisings. The wars in Libya and Yemen were fought on battlegrounds from which the incumbent rulers of 2011 had already, if even temporarily, been driven. To give sectarianism and external intervention their due place is not, however, to represent these revolutions as simply sectarian proxy conflicts for a wider regional confrontation between Iran and Saudi Arabia or the United States and the 'axis of resistance'.

Rather, sectarianisation and civil war were consequences of counterrevolutionary strategy. In Syria, a cross-sectarian elite (albeit with an Alawi core) depended on sectarian and communal militias recruited from the poorer non-Sunnis. This strategy reflected the material nature of 'sect' as recomposed under the economic reforms of Assad *fils*: wherein Sunni and Alawi alike were drawn into an informal labour market, but the latter were far more likely to have the connections to escape from it. Not all of the Syrian counter-revolution could be ascribed to such factors, however. The 'afterlives', to use Sara Salem's term of both the Ba'athist national developmental revolution and its war against Islamists in the early 1980s and of the (limited) neoliberal prosperity of the mid-2000s exerted a strong influence on different components of the counter-revolutionary coalition. To these afterlives could be added the ambiguity and confusion of the population 'in the grey zone', to which the proliferation of narratives in old and new media about the revolution and civil war further contributed.231

The sectarianism of the Bahraini monarchy was more overt, albeit couched in the language of security and moderation against a supposed Iranian threat. As in Syria, this sectarianism relied not upon doctrinal or cultural differences but rather a set of material structures that placed one group of Sunnis – the *Aal Khalifa* – in command of both polity and economy and relied upon sectarian identification to maintain this dominance. The forms of residential and occupational segregation, and the forms of sectarian consciousness produced by these, allowed for the particular repressive tactics adopted by the Bahraini regime. These resembled on a much smaller scale, however, to Damascus' successful efforts to divide, isolate and radicalise opposition areas. The much greater spread of those areas and scale of the population within them was one

reason why Syria fell into a decadelong civil war, while the Bahraini counter-revolution was initially completed in weeks.

Conclusion 185

Neither regime could have succeeded without external counterrevolutionary intervention, however. Their respective support bases were too narrow to do otherwise. In Syria, although Russia and Iran made by far the greatest contribution to maintaining the regime, competing counter-revolutionary axes fostered their own clients at the expense of the popular uprising. In Bahrain, the situation was far more straightforward – neighbouring Saudi Arabia and its GCC allies simply invaded the country, in effect, in order to preserve the Khalifas in power. In both cases then, external counter-revolutionary intervention functioned to preserve the regimes. What of those more complicated cases wherein the state effectively collapsed into externally backed civil war – Libya and Yemen?

6. From Revolution to State Collapse; Libya and Yemen

Libya and Yemen present a different post-revolutionary picture to either Tunisia and Egypt or Syria and Bahrain. Whereas the former witnessed political revolutions either reversed or contained, and the latter militarised counter-revolutions that maintained the rulers of 2011 in power, these two states fractured into competing polities. Both Libya and Yemen featured at least three contending claimants to sovereign power at points in the decade after 2011: more if one includes the would-be *wilayat* established by Islamist groups such as ISIS and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Both states became battlegrounds for the confrontation between shifting, and by no means consistent, regional and international alliances. The human consequences of this state collapse were bleak – especially in Yemen, where more than 200,000 mostly civilian lives had been lost by the end of the decade, including to the world's largest-ever recorded outbreak of cholera.1

To attempt to identify 'revolutionaries' and 'counter-revolutionaries' amongst this congeries of warring factions might be considered a fool's errand. Even more than the highly destructive civil war in Syria, the wars in Libya and Yemen seem to confirm the view of the Arab uprisings as a dangerous indulgence in a region populated by weak but well-armed states – and doubly to confirm the folly of Western intervention as visited upon Libya. Promising beginnings such as the parliamentary elections in 2012 and the National Dialogue Conference in Yemen in 2013 could not prevent the outbreak in both states of externally backed civil war and outright collapse of the central state institutions.2 In such views, the preexisting weakness of these institutions, riven by tribal and geographical (and in the case of Yemen, sectarian) factionalism, made civil war all but inevitable once the old regimes were challenged in 2011.

The purchase of these arguments cannot be denied. Nonetheless, the lens of revolution and counter-revolution helps to re-arrange the complex pictures of the Libyan and Yemeni civil wars. To be sure, in neither country did a central body – along the line of Egypt's SCAF, for example – hold enough authority to pursue a nationwide counter-revolutionary project. In part, this absence was the result of the more thoroughgoing nature of the revolutions themselves. In Yemen, the coercive apparatus (never in full command of all the territory of the state) fractured to a much greater degree in 2011 than in any other of the Arab uprisings. In Libya, where the military also witnessed significant defections, the NATO bombing campaign and execution of Gaddafi dismantled the central architecture of the Libyan state: both Libyans and Yemenis were

faced with the challenge, and the opportunity, of reconstructing a new version of their polities. The respective counterrevolutions consisted, in part, of the exclusion from that reconstruction of the popular movements that had led the revolution, which fell away in the dominance of militias in Libya or the 2011 diplomatic compact by which Saudi Arabia sought to preserve the Saleh regime without Saleh. To recognise these phenomena as counter-revolutionary is also to recognise the appeal, familiar from the cases discussed in previous chapters, of the 'afterlives' of prior revolutions from above: whether Gaddafi's carbon-fired 'republic of the masses' or the republican revolution of North Yemen in the 1960s and 1970s. The most clearly counterrevolutionary force in both cases was to be found outside of the state's borders, however, in the efforts of Saudi Arabia and the UAE to extinguish any alternative political example in the region. The lineaments of counter-revolution can be found, then, in the otherwise bloody confusion of the Libyan and Yemeni battlegrounds – but where do they begin?

Counter-Revolution from Above

If counter-revolution is a project pursued to reverse or prevent a revolution – social or political – then the Libyan and Yemeni cases present difficulties in identifying the phenomenon. The repression pursued before the overthrows of Gaddafi and Ali Abdallah Saleh offers clear examples of counter-revolutionary violence. After the fall or removal of these dictators, however, the proliferation of armed factions in Libya and Yemen renders moot the identification of any 'above' from which such a project could be pursued. In this respect, Yemen and Libya resemble those historical examples of revolution in which the old regime is indeed toppled and its partisans transformed into competitors with the new revolutionary power – yet lacking, in the Yemeni and Libyan cases, the firm establishment of such a power either.

Nonetheless, counter-revolution in the sense of both the suppression and exclusion of the popular movements that brought about the revolution and of attempts to reinstate a version of the old regime were present in Libya and Bahrain. These attempts were not necessarily made by the same people. On the one hand, the dominance of militias (even more marked in the early militarisation of Libya's revolt than in Yemen) excluded and often repressed the popular mobilisations witnessed in the early part of the revolutions. On the other, remnants of the old state provided personnel and organisation for openly counter-revolutionary endeavours backed by Saudi Arabia and the GCC: Field Marshal Haftar in Libya and the Hadi government (confusingly opposed by the old dictator, Saleh) in Yemen. If these projects could not be entirely said to proceed 'from above', they did weld together fractions of the pre2011 elites.

Libya

The killing of Gaddafi in October 2011 marked the end of the *jamahiriya* but opened up a new contest amongst its successors. On one side, those parts of the old state apparatus that reappeared under the NTC and sought to overturn the political revolution of 2011 and, on the other, those who sought to preserve it, albeit quarantined from any form of deeper social revolution. The former were typically glossed as 'secularists' and the latter as 'Islamists' although, as explained later, in neither case was this char-

acterisation accurate: 'both sides include[d]the entire spectrum of Islamists in their ranks...the more salient division' being 'between two political tendencies'.3 This division, present already before the fall of Gaddafi, sharpened the instant a new national authority had to be formed. The NTC declared the country liberated on the 23rd of October 2011. One week later, the UN mandate for military action was lifted. The first cabinet placed defence and the interior ministry in the hands of militia commanders, while the economic portfolios accrued to former functionaries of the national oil company. To the extent that the new cabinet's writ ran in the country, it was reliant upon 'a middle management steeped in decades of Gaddafism'.4

The initial plan for the post-Gaddafi state envisaged elections to a General National Council that would then oversee the writing of a new constitution. A further election would then be held under that constitution to establish a 'House of Representatives' as the legislature of a new parliamentary system. The GNC elections were held in July of 2012 and, although far from free of in. Mahmoud Jibril's National Forces Alliance won a substantial plurality of thirty-nine seats, trailed by the 'Justice and Construction' list supported by the Muslim Brotherhood. Two-thirds of the seats in the GNC were allocated to political party candidates and the remainder to independents: which meant those able to draw on local or tribal networks of affiliation. The first cabinet under the GNC was not formed until the autumn of 2012 under the premiership of Ali Zeidan. These elections were frequently described in the Western press as a victory for 'liberals' or 'secularists'. As noted earlier, this lens obscures more than it reveals. Muslim Brotherhood affiliates and Salafists – associated with the *asala* ('authenticity') movement of Grand Mufti Sadeq al-Ghariani, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group or the *watan* party of Abdelhakim Belhadj – formed the only ideologically coherent block in the GNC. For that reason, the Islamists' opponents became defined by their opposition even while forming the parliamentary majority. More than a common worldview or programme, what united the National Forces Alliance was 'belonging to an economically privileged class and prominent families': that section of Libya's pre-1969 elite that had neither fled into exile nor been entirely crushed by the Gaddafi regime but formed a *modus vivendi* with it. Although members of this group might have founded and paid for some of the anti-Gaddafi militias, they were unlikely to share much in common with the underand un-employed young men who fought in them. For these fighters, the new politicians had been suspiciously soft on the old regime or were even 'pretenders and holdovers from *jama'at Sayf* [i.e more neoliberal wing of the regime associated with Seif al-Islam]'.5

The bewildering array of tactical alliances amongst the armed factions that emerged after the fall of Gaddafi was underpinned by this division. Although often articulated as a conflict between 'Islamists' and 'secularists', the more common distinction was that drawn between 'revolutionaries' (*thuwwar*) and 'counter-revolutionaries' (*azlam*, as in Tunisia). No one would freely define themselves as an *azlam*, of course, but to the *thuwwar* the category extended far beyond the immediate members of the old regime. Within the apparent disorder of Libya's attempted transition, then, two overall poles

of attraction emerged. The Muslim Brotherhood and (some) Salafists who had been most repressed under Gaddafi found common cause with the militia fighters who had fought hardest against the regime (as in Misrata) and were, therefore, least willing to extend any leniency to its perceived holdovers. Amongst these, they numbered Jibril and his supporters in the GNC, who sought to utilise what remained of Gaddafi's state machinery and to take a more conciliatory line with districts and tribes that had not supported the uprising.6 The militias that had arisen so quickly in the fight against Gaddafi insisted on the need to maintain their arms because of the threat of counter-revolution by the colonel's supporters. The 'Political Isolation Law' of April 2012 excluded former functionaries of the regime from legislative or executive positions – a generous cut-off date permitting the leadership of the NTC, many of whom had served under Gaddafi until shortly before the revolution, to continue in political roles. By contrast, laws 35 and 38 of that year immunised the *thuwwar* against prosecution for any crimes – including human rights violations – committed in the name of the the 17th of February revolution.

Stark though the division between *azlam* and *thuwwar*, the coverage of both terms expanded far beyond those who had actually fought for or against the old regime. To be a *tha'ir* was to have access to income, immunity, arms: to belong to the *azlam* was to be excluded from all these things. The fall of the Gaddafi regime thereby provoked an inflation in the numbers of both, as young men –often newly unemployed – sought the advantages of militia membership while the label of 'counter-revolutionary' was applied, opportunistically or not, to entire populations perceived as sympathetic to Gaddafi. In the words of one Misratan militia commander some three years after the uprising, 'the total number of revolutionaries who fought Qaddafi across the country was less than 40,000...We don't understand how the number has reached 200,000'.7 Entire regions or tribes – such as the million-strong Warfalla or the city of Bani Walid with a population of 80,000 – found themselves stigmatised as *azlam* even though only a minority of their number had fought for the *jamahiriya*.8

On paper, this patchwork was ruled over by a government established by reasonably free and fair election, albeit with significant exclusion of people associated both with Gaddafi's rule and the NTC. In actuality, the authority of the GNC was challenged on all sides by the militias of 2011 – or rather the vastly inflated number of armed men claiming the legitimacy of the struggle against Gaddafi. Zeidan himself was kidnapped and briefly held by disgruntled militiamen in October of 2013. Two months later, the GNC voted unilaterally to extend its mandate for a further year beyond the date at which a new elected body, the House of Representatives, was scheduled to assume legislative authority following from a constituent assembly elected in February 2014. The House of Representatives was elected – on an extremely low turnout of 22 per cent in the general election of 2014. The GNC then refused to cede its legitimacy. Broadly speaking, the rump GNC that reconvened in Tripoli contained (but was not necessarily dominated by) MB-aligned members, while the Tobruk-based HoR comprised mainly their opponents. The competing legislatures produced competing executives (although

the Central Bank and National Oil company remained effectively aligned with the Tripoli government). The 'second Libyan civil war' that began in 2014 was thus fought out between forces broadly, but not always exclusively, aligned with these institutions.9

The GNC came to be dominated by MB, Salafist and *thuwwar* deputies who wished to enforce the political exclusion law was that the other deputies increasingly boycotted proceedings. The split in the legislature was the endpoint of this process: although originally mandated to convene in Benghazi, the majority of the 188 deputies of the House of Representatives decamped to Tobruk. At the time, Benghazi was dominated by the 'Consultative Council of Benghazi Revolutionaries' sympathetic to the hardline anti-old regime stance of the *thuwwar.* The adhesive of the GNC coalition was the idea of 'radical overhaul of the state inherited from the old regime'. The HoR comprised those less committed to such an overhaul, or harbouring genuinely counter-revolutionary ambitions – 'ex-Qadhafi-era officials who joined the 2011 uprising... threatened by the revolutionary political and military leadership;...diehard loyalists in exile and local constituencies who blame[d] instability on empowerment of Islamist groups and the poor governance of the GNC'.10

The geographical separation of the rival parliaments demonstrated their dependence on militia allies that could protect them. The GNC was already backed by many (but not all) Islamist militias and by the particularly battle-hardened Misratan militia. The Tobruk government formed an alliance with the openly counter-revolutionary force of the Libyan National Army led by Khalifa Haftar. Field Marshal Haftar aspired to a counter-revolution on the Egyptian model: a political counter-revolution, based on the army and directed against the political Islamists who had benefitted from the fall of the old regime. Lacking any kind of social programme – not even the pseudo-Nasserism of a Sisi – Haftar was able to attract support from both Cyrenaican monarchists, chafing at the continued post-revolutionary dominance of Tripolitania, and 'federalists, secessionists, local businesspeople and elements of certain tribes'.11 Those Gaddafi-era officials who had joined the revolution but found themselves attacked after 2011 as insufficiently revolutionary, or as holdovers of the old regime, formed another base of support. Haftar even had his advocates amongst human rights activists expressing the basic desire for order and security run roughshod by the rule of militias and Islamist factions in Benghazi.12

The cornerstone of Haftar's project was, however, the remnant of the old Libyan armed forces: despite the Field Marshal having spent two decades in US exile following his capture in Chad in the bungled war of the 1980s. Haftar provided the notional armed forces for the Libyan National Salvation Front, Washington's favoured opposition group in the 1990s. Having played no part in the initial uprising, Haftar returned to Libya in 2011 and proclaimed himself head of the armed forces of the

NTC: contradicted by the existing political and military leadership, he was forced to settle for third in command. The demotion was not to last for long. Seizing the opportunity of the collapse in authority of the GNC in early 2014, Haftar declared – ineffectually – the body dissolved as a preliminary step to building up his forces for

an assault on Benghazi in May of that year under the banner of fighting terrorism. The presence of an ISIS affiliate in the town of Derna provided the *casus belli*, but Haftar's long-term aim was to oust the Muslim Brotherhood and its representatives in the minority GNC.

Electoral mandate notwithstanding, the GNC's attempt to extend its mandate attracted popular protest on the day of its scheduled dissolution. A week later, General Khalifa Haftar – the primary counterrevolutionary force in Libya – declared the GNC dissolved. Crisis turned to civil war when Haftar's forces launched 'Operation Dignity', an assault on Cyrenaica under the banner of cleansing the region of Jihadists: a category to which Haftar assimilated all his Islamist political opponents. Those opponents responded by forming an alliance of their own, 'Libya Dawn', which by August 2014 had taken control of the capital.13

The second Libyan civil war was fought between these forces, shepherded to a fragile – and in the end, temporary – agreement by the UN in December 2015. This agreement established a Government of National Accord headed by Fayez al-Sarraj. Although the support of both the rump GNC and the House of Representatives – and more importantly the militias allied to them – formed the premise of this agreement, the former withdrew their support soon after its conclusion and the latter proved either unable or unwilling to step into the vacuum. From a conflict between the GNC and Libya Dawn, on one side, and General Haftar and the House of Representatives, on the other, the Libyan civil war evolved into a confrontation between Haftar and the weakly embedded forces of the Government of National Accord. Haftar increasingly attracted the support of outside powers, such as Russia, France and Egypt, that had sponsored the 2015 agreement, until he was confident enough to attempt to take Tripoli in the spring of 2019.

These successive civil wars, although glossed as conflicts between Islamists and secularists, are better understood as battles between political revolutionaries who wished to root out all remnants of Gaddafi's system and political counter-revolutionaries, emulating the Egyptian example, who wish to build a new military-authoritarian state based on the remnants of the old. Although Islamists of all kinds were to be found in both of these formations, the extirpation of 'terrorism' and the exclusion of its alleged practitioners (especially the Muslim Brotherhood) from political power provided the rallying point for the latter.

Yemen

In Yemen, the clearest example of counter-revolution, paradoxically, was to be found in the externally sponsored agreement that removed President Ali Abdallah Saleh from power in November 2011. The purpose of this agreement was to remove the head of the ruling regime in order to preserve its substance – the network of shared class interest under Saudi patronage that embraced parts of the opposition Joint Meeting Parties. This system represented the inheritance of two previous moments of revolution from above: the republican revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, which dispossessed the old imamate and its social base in the *saʿada*, and the absorption-cum-subjugation of the

People's Democratic Republic of Yemen in 1990. Those excluded from this system the Northern Houthi movement based amongst the Zaydi *sa ada*, and the Southern *hiraak*, or independence movement, thus, became the protagonists of its downfall in 2014.

How was this point reached? At the beginning of the uprising, the Saleh regime adopted familiar tactics of counter-revolutionary repression seen elsewhere: the deployment of violence by plain clothes thugs on the *shabiha* or *baltageya* model, and the shooting of protestors by out-ofuniform snipers. The killings on the 18th of March that provoked Ali Mohsen and his supporters in the regime fully to break with Saleh were an example of such tactics.14 Saleh, like Bashar al-Assad and the house of Khalifa, was also able to muster large counter-demonstrations of his own in Tahrir Square in Sana'a and in other cities. Organised through the ruling party, the General People's Congress (GPC), civil service and security forces, most of the revolutionary protestors believed these proSaleh demonstrators were paid to turn up – even if so, the fear of revolutionary disorder and threats to property that provided the basis for counter-revolution from below in other contexts was also present in Yemen. As one Sana'a pro-Saleh protestor put it, '[p]eople are afraid of what will happen if the protests continue. They worry about their homes, their families and their belongings'.15

On the street, police and state security joined these counter-protestors in denying the revolutionaries access to central roads and squares, and deploying slogans against 'sedition', 'sabotage' and 'foreign agents' to delegitimise the uprising. Saleh also adopted a series of other tactics, falling short of the full-blooded repression seen in Syria and Libya, but borrowing the practice of selective economic concessions: increasing welfare payments and civil servants' salaries, reducing income tax and university tuition fees and promising to open up further government employment to new graduates.16

Neither repression – restrained by the existence of competing power centres within the regime and beyond – nor promises of economic inducements – which a sceptical populace had grown used to hearing before – were able to prevent the crack in the regime after March 2011. The resulting series of armed confrontations between Saleh's faction and Ali Mohsen and his allies in the Al-Ahmar section of the Hashid tribal confederation culminated with a bomb attack on Saleh's life in June 2011 that left him seriously injured. The agreement produced under Saudi auspices during Saleh's convalescence demonstrated the continuity of the regime without him, leading to the paradoxical alliance in 2014 of the former dictator with his former enemies, the Houthis, both fighting against the transitional agreement that preserved the old regime without the old president at the top of it.

In content reformist, in substance the GCC agreement was counterrevolutionary: according to Atiaf al-Wazir, ''a by-product of political negotiations that excluded the vast majority on the street' designed to shift attention 'away from the comprehensive social changes that were the demands of the revolutionary movement'.17 When representatives of the JMP parties signed the agreement – months before Saleh was strongarmed into doing so by the Saudis in November 2011 – protestors chanted at

them the slogan '*la qabila wa la ahzaab, thawratana thawrat shabab*' (no tribe, no parties, our revolution is a youth revolution)'.18

The transition agreement consisted of three parts: an amnesty for Salih – who remained leader of the GPC – and his lieutenants; a transitional executive headed by the universally unobjectionable Southerner Muhammad Basindwa, followed by presidential elections in which Saleh's vice-president Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi would be the only candidate; and a 'National Dialogue Conference' composed of political and 'civil society' representatives who would establish the parameters for the post-Hadi political system. Of these three pillars then, only the NDC, lacking any form of executive power, had any connection to competitive popular legitimacy of the kind demanded by the revolutionaries. The agreement kept the GPC in power, therefore, the party and patronage layers beneath Salih, while dividing up cabinet posts between the GPC and JMP–predominantly Islah.19

The common social base for this agreement had long roots, reaching back to the 1960s republican revolution and civil war that overthrew the Imam and to the absorption of the PDRY thirty years later. The Zaydi imamate, which ruled the Northern Yemeni highlands for a millennium, lay on a base of ascriptive distinction not dissimilar to that operative in South Asia or across the Red Sea in Ethiopia.20 Patrilineal inheritance granted rights to 'tribesmen' to agricultural land and obligations to defend it under the command of a sheikh. Intertwined with but distinct from the sheikhs – and over time becoming landholders in their own right – were the *saˁada*, the descendants of the house of the Prophet. Under Zaydi doctrine, the ruling Imam could only be drawn from this group, but any *sayyid* could challenge the ruling Imam under certain conditions. Not all Zaydis (or even most) are *saˁada* nor are all *saˁada* Zaydis, with a substantial proportion of *saˁada* being Southern (Sunni) Shafe'is. The *qadis* or legal scholars were another group who over time acquired hereditary identification with administrative and educational work. Outside of these favoured groups were found the lower and outcastes such as the *muhamashiin*, typically demarcated by ideologies of skin colour and geographical origin and working in agricultural labour or various denigrated occupations.21

The civil war of 1962–70 that founded the Yemeni Arab Republic represented a revolution of (mostly Zaydi) sheikhs against the *saˁada*. The republicans not only deposed the Imam himself but systematically dismantled the social status of the ruling caste from which he came: 'identified with reactionary backwardness, sometimes despised in a fashion akin to the French republican aversion to aristocracy and royalty'.22 The Republic built a new ruling class, fashioned mainly through the army and sustained not by the agricultural tribute upon which the old order had relied but Saudi subvention, real estate speculation and later oil and security rents disbursed from Washington.23 This ruling class was further entrenched by the unification of the PDRY and YAR in 1990, and the brief civil war in the former triumphed over the latter in 1994, and embraced both members of the GPC and opposition *Islah*. The GCC sponsored agree-

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ment represented a compact within this class, at the expense of the popular movement of 2011.

This evident continuity with the pre-2011 regime guaranteed by the transition agreement aside, turnout for Hadi's uncontested election was high and the NDC went ahead despite several threatened and actual boycotts.24 The NDC comprised 565 members, 52 per cent of whom came from the South – a marked over-representation – 7 per cent civil society organisations and 15 per cent 'youth'. Some 28.5 per cent of the members were women.25 Organised into nine sub-committees, the NDC represented the arena in which three political currents excluded from the Islah-GPC executive compact were charged with finding a solution to the revolutionary crisis. These included the Houthis, dominating most of the representation from the northernmost regions; the Southern independence movement or *hiraak*, equally hegemonic in the territory of the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen; and the underrepresented 'youth', NGOs and workers' movements who had proved central to the revolution. The eventual failure of the NDC, embodied in its inability to develop a satisfactory federal model for the state, produced coalitions of the dissatisfied. The Houthis improbably allied with their old enemy Saleh, still powerful enough to chafe at his concessions under the GCC agreement, and the Southern movement with the increasingly unpopular Hadi and his Gulf backers.

Who were these protagonists? The Houthis had their origins in the opposition to the republican revolution from above prosecuted in the civil war of 1962–70. Known after their founder, the Zaydi cleric Hussein Badr al-Din al-Houthi, the 'Ansar Allah' (as the movement styled itself) emerged as a response to Salafi proselytisation, encouraged from Sana'a, in the Zaydi northern heartlands in the 1990s. The movement combined a Zaydi revivalist doctrine – reflecting the hardening of distinction between 'Sunni' Shafe'i and 'Shi'a' Zaydi jurisprudence spurred by the growth of Salafi trends in Northern Yemen – with anti-imperialist and anti-Semitic positions embodied in the slogan: 'God is Great! Death to America! Death to Israel! Curse upon the Jews! Victory to Islam!'26 The Houthis opposed Saleh's co-operation with US forces, leading to the assassination of Badr al-Din and six bouts of armed confrontation between 2004 and 2010. There was some suggestion that just as al-Qaeda offered Saleh a card to play in his relations with the United States, so did the Houthis in his rivalry with Ali Mohsen.27

The Houthis represented a very curious ideological fusion indeed – the counter-revolutionaries of a monarchical order, reborn as a kind of Islamic republicanism. Their social base lay in the *saᶜada*, the old ruling clerisy of the Imamate. Embracing the doctrine of *khuruj* – the overthrow of an unjust ruler – while downplaying their adherence to *saᶜada* supremacy, the Houthis paradoxically transformed themselves into 'a powerful social revolutionary movement...directed against the political and economic empowerment of a small elite group that was the pillar of the republican order'.28 Not only this, but the Houthis were actually successful, having killed, dispossessed or driven off most of the pro-Saleh sheikhs by 2011.29

The curious heritage of the Houthis led to accusations from their enemies that they retained the counter-revolutionary politics of the 1960s: *malikiyyiin*, 'monarchists' who wished to restore the Imamate and its doctrine of the *shart al-batnayn*, the restriction of political power to those of Hashemite *saᶜada* descent.30 These suspicions were shared by many of the youthful protestors staffing the revolutionary encampments of 2011.31 Within the NDC, however, the Houthis advanced an agenda that brought them closer to the civil society and youth delegates: a 'second republic' based on participation rather than patronage, drawing inspiration rather than legislation from Islamic jurisprudence and opening the highest executive office to all regardless of sect or gender.32 These positions, and their advocacy of federalism, also brought the Houthis temporarily close to the representatives of the *hiraak*, the Southern independence movement, who participated in the NDC.33

Where the Houthis had their origin in the opponents of the 1960s revolution from above in the North, that of the *Hiraak* lay in the equivalent in the South. The experience of the PDRY bequeathed Southern activists a sense of cultural distinction – justified or not – in which the South was seen as progressive, civil and secular and the North as backward, tribal and Islamist.34 The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen overthrew not a monarchical-theocratic hybrid such as the Imamate of the North but rather a British crown colony and its local allies. The more radical National Liberation Front outmanoeuvred the quasi-Nasserist 'Front for the Liberation of South Yemen' in the struggle for independence in 1967, giving birth to the only 'state of socialist orientation' in the Arab world. Never free from repression and factional strife, the PDRY nonetheless gave its population a functioning state administration and a degree of service provision both more egalitarian and of higher quality than its Northern neighbour.35 This entailed not only official campaigns against tribal identification, such as the replacement of tribal with personal surnames, but a redistribution of land and resources.36 Land was officially nationalised under the PDRY until the end of its existence: the day before unification with the North in May 1990, one of the last acts of the PDRY was to bequeath ownership of nationalised property to their tenants *in situ*, forestalling claims for restitution.37 Needless to say, such policies did not endear the PDRY to the pre-independence elite of Aden: the latter representing, in the words of one surviving member of this class, 'Southern Bedouin' who 'descended upon Aden... nationalised everything...attacked Adenis and stole their homes'.38

The post-Cold War unification of the South Arabian republics – there had never been a single entity of 'Yemen' before 1990 – lay behind the movement for Southern separation that would re-emerge thirty years later. Despite having lost their superpower patron in the USSR, the leaders of the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) believed that they would dominate the unified state in defiance of the demographic weight of the North. Once this illusion was dispelled, the South seceded again in 1994. The resulting civil war was decisively won by Saleh's Northern, partially reliant on Islamist militias keen to eradicate what they saw as atheistic Communism.39 After this victory, Southern

politicians and activists accused Sana'a of treating the South as occupied territory rather than an equal part of the republic: substantial amounts of land

(all nationalised under the PDRY) were distributed either to their former owners or to Saleh's allies and officers. The YSP was 'decimated', Aden reduced to a provincial husk, and Southerners subject to the brunt of service cuts with little redress to the informal channels of access dominated by Saleh's northern clique.40 From this background, and especially the injustice of denying pensions to former Southern military personnel, emerged the 'Southern movement' that by 2011 had already been protesting for several years and by some accounts could rely upon the support of 70 per cent of the area's population.41

It was the strength of these two regionally based insurgent movements that rendered the question of federalism so contentious in the NDC. The congress did reach an agreement on a document – after the assassination of several delegates – but this included within its provisions the extension of Hadi's mandate and, therefore, the GCC's old regime compact. The Houthis were the beneficiaries of this continued restoration, despite, paradoxically, allying themselves with the waning power of Ali Abdullah Saleh in 2013–14: for one Houthi supporter, the movement reflected the opposition of '[t]he Yemeni people...against the entire corrupt old regime, not just one person' and stood to overthrow 'the GCC initiative [that] has preserved the same pattern of corruption' amongst the elite inside and outside the GPC.42 In the words of another, the 'Huthis [sic] went to the squares and spoke for the oppressed. The traditional parties joined the revolution too but now they are in government and corruption has just shifted to their hands'.43 Having stood outside the counter-revolution of the GCC transition process, the Houthis now stood to benefit from its collapse.

The moment of their triumph came in 2014, when the movement and its allies from Saleh's camp, amongst others, swept into Sana'a and forced Hadi's administration to flee to Aden. Their slogans were directed against the transitional government and the unfulfilled promise of the revolution rather than the restoration of the *anciens regimes* of either Saleh or the Imamate: offering instead 'stirring populist, nationalist rhetoric and widespread complaints about corruption intended to appeal to southerners, other Shafi'is and most Yemenis'.44 The trigger for the Houthi takeover was the reduction of fuel subsidies in July 2014 – a common reason for protests in the region, especially in the hot summer months.45 For this reason, the Houthis were virtually unopposed in their takeover of Sana'a. This 'September 21 Revolution' established a 'revolutionary committee' as a parallel body to the 'political committee' of the GPC: their initial demand was for a new government that would implement the NDC proposals.46 The *hiraak*, perceiving the southward advance of this alliance as a Northern invasion, took sides with the enfeebled Hadi. Few bedfellows, in the region or elsewhere, have been so strange. No surprise, then that these alliances too had broken down by 2018: Saleh, shot in the head by a Houthis sniper while fleeing to Saudi Arabia, and the 'Southern Transitional Council' seizing control of Aden. The Houthi takeover of Sana'a brought a new phase of direct, GCC involvement in Yemen – an on the ground

counter-revolution spearheaded by the UAE and Saudi Arabia. In the spring of 2015, these powers took it upon themselves to defend Hadi's government, and the old-regime compact it represented, against the Houthi threat. The ensuing war, as discussed later, formed the centrepiece of Saudi Arabia's regional counter-revolutionary strategy under Mohammed Bin Salman.47 This regional and international counter-revolution was pursued by air bombardment, maritime siege and ground offensive – the latter drawing in the ground troops of the UAE, far more sympathetic than Riyadh to the Southern *hiraak* as a counterweight to Islah. Nine other states joined in this offensive, and the United States backed the Saudi operation initially with some public misgivings before turning to full-throated support under the Trump administration.

Counter-Revolution from Below

Egypt and Tunisia witnessed the emergence of counter-revolutionary mass movements animated by the inheritance of post-colonial revolutions from above. Such movements even incorporated a part of the revolutionaries, both alienated by the conservatism of the Islamists brought to power by these political revolutions and attracted by the 'afterlives' of post-colonial nation-building.48 In Syria, the appeal of the latter was far from absent in fostering a 'grey zone' between revolution and regime, melding the rhetoric of high Ba'athism from the 1970s and 1980s with invocations of the neoliberal prosperity of the 2000s threatened by the 'backward' populations of the country's internal periphery.49 More vital in both Syria and Bahrain, however, were the forms of sectarian identification – resting on the pre-2011 political economy of these states and cultivated by the regimes in crisis – through which a narrow but firm popular base for the counter-revolutionary project could be built.

The Libyan and Yemeni civil wars, by contrast, have been read as simply tribal or – in the case of Yemen, sectarian – conflicts exacerbated or triggered by external intervention in pursuit of regime change objectives. Just as in Syria and Bahrain, however, tribes and sects form mobilising networks, derived from the political economies of the previous regimes and which the protagonists in these conflicts utilised rather than represented. At the heart of these civil wars, variegated and changeable as the alliances prosecuting they may be, lay the question of whether the revolutionary situations opened in 2011 were to be resolved in ways that resembled the old state or constitute a new one. Even if a central authority capable of pushing through a counter-revolutionary project was absent then, counter-revolutionaries such as Khalifa Haftar (or the GCC-backed government in Yemen) had to seek allies for their attempts to achieve the former.

Tribes and sects, more commonly seen as the protagonists of the wars in Libya and Yemen, are better seen as sites and resources for the battle over these respective revolutions. To make such a claim does not mean that *tribalism* and *sectarianisation* were unimportant in turning the Yemen and Libyan revolutions into civil wars but that they were important processes rather than actors.

Libya

This claim may seem particularly difficult to support in Libya, where militias based on tribal allegiance appear as the primary protagonists of the post-2011 civil wars. If given a political colouration, these are seen as a clash between the 'Islamists' of the Tripoli government and the 'secularists' of Field Marshal Haftar. Neither of these optics quite capture the nature of the conflict. For example, Haftar's most hardened fighting forces included Salafi Islamists: the so-called Madkhali-Salafis after their Sheikh, the Saudi 'alim , Rabee al-Madkhali.50 For the Madkhalis, democracy is a 'Western evil', opening the public sphere to contestation beyond the control of the legitimate ruler and therefore encouraging the 'partisanship' – ta'asub of groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood.51 The Madkhali opposition to political pluralism and electoral competition chimed well with Field Marshal Haftar's project of re-founding a strong military regime. Preaching militant obedience to *any* ruler, however, Madkhalis could also be found amongst Haftar's enemies.52

Just as Islamist/secularist is an insufficient framework through which to understand Libya's civil war, so is tribalism. Tribes formed a part of both the mobilisation of the uprising and its aftermath, as did localities. The prominent and powerful militias from areas such as Misrata and Zintan recruited their members by means of kinship ties and local identification, as well as overall hostility to the Gaddafi regime.53 These two prominent militias would end up on different sides of the post-2014 civil war, with the Misratans supporting the GNC/ Libya Dawn and the Zintanis Field Marshal Haftar and the LNA.

Nonetheless, the Libyan conflict was not a war *between* tribes. Rather than a unit, the tribe is better thought of as a network or a resource, and tribalism as an ideology compatible with that of the national state. Tribal members, even those who profess a strong sense of belonging to and identification with the history of their tribe, rarely, if ever, know the names of its self-identified leaders. The loyalties of those leaders, or competitors to their position, by no means assured the loyalty of all members of the tribe. The Warfalla, for example, were seen as supporters of the old regime after 2011: yet many of the members joined the revolution in its early stages, including the first prime minister Mahmoud Jibril. Young members of the Zintan – who would later join forces with Field Marshal Haftar – pushed their elders to break their historic association with the Qadhafa.54 Tribes were a conduit and a means of mobilisation for differing political visions of Libya in the 2011 revolution rather than actors in their own right.

Tribalism, however, was central to the Gaddafi project. In the early days of the 'Green Revolution', Gaddafi had sought to create administrative boundaries and political loyalties that would cut across the kinship confederations of the Sennusid monarchy – albeit couched in terms of the *jamahiriya* as a kind of national super-tribe with Gaddafi at its head. Reflecting his turn away from the 'revolutionary committees' as a power base in the early 1990s, the colonel attempted to re-integrate self-proclaimed tribal leaderships into his state through the 'popular social leadership'.55 In this regard, as in others, Libya followed the lead of the other Arab nationalist republics such

as Syria and Iraq, as they retreated from their initial radicalism in the 1990s and came to rely more upon Islamic and kinship organisations as mediators with their populations. As in Syria, preferential recruitment and investment created a geographical and material base for ascriptive identities as 'towns such as Bani Walid and Tarhuna' became a source of military and police recruits while 'other communities languished'. Also reminiscent of Syria, rumours – and in the case of the Tawergha, real experience – of revolutionary brutality encouraged some members of these historically favoured tribes and communities to join pro-Gaddafi militias.56

Although Gaddafi's regime rested on a far narrower substratum than that of Nasser, or even of the Syrian Ba'ath, the 'Green Revolution' of the 1970s had real consequences that persisted even four decades later. The origins of this 'state of the masses' lay in the 1968 coup that brought to power Muammar Gaddafi and his allies in the Libyan Free Officers and deposed the Sennussi monarchy. Gaddafi was by no means the sole author of the coup: but following several years of factional manoeuvre, the colonel was able to launch his carbon-fuelled version of the revolutions from above pursued by his predecessors in Egypt, Syria and Iraq. The revolution began with the 'removal of the discredited old regime' and the 'expulsion of foreign bases and settlers, and...forceful advocacy of the Palestinian and anti-imperialist causes'.57

Having expropriated the property of the small merchant and landholding elite of Cyrenaica and pursued a programme of land reform and state-led investment in the early 1970s, Gaddafi took a more radical turn in the middle of the decade based on new interpretation of Islam as revolutionary egalitarianism.58 Real estate ownership was restricted to one dwelling per household: as outlined in the *Green Book*, the parliament and political parties were abolished to be replaced by people's committees and popular congresses supposedly practising a form of direct democracy.59 In practice, these organs remained a dead letter but the country's neglected and impoverished tribes and villages – many of them composed of darker-skinned Libyans subject to racist discrimination – did indeed experience a striking improvement in their standard of living. The inheritance of this revolution from above, if far patchier and lacking in the nationally integrative character of its Egyptian counterpart, nonetheless persisted in the towns and districts with high levels of support for the Gaddafi regime in 2011.60

As Gaddafi switched again in the 1990s towards a more 'infitah' policy, tribes also came to operate as a kind of mutual insurance fund. In Libya, before 2011 citizens could never be sure of the impartiality of state services and after 2011 not even of their existence or functioning. A monthly subscription provided for a 'mutual aid fund' on which tribal members could draw in distress.61 For supporters of the regime, the tribe formed a network through which patronage could be disbursed. Emerging from a state where political parties were banned and organisations such as independent trade unions non-existent, after 2011 tribal links formed a means – as well as localities, families, prayer groups and so on – by which political and military organisation could be pursued and rewarded.

Rather than tribe versus tribe, or secularist versus Islamist – and although both tribal and Islamist militias were central protagonists in the conflict – Libya was riven by the question of what to do about the state. On the one hand stood political revolutionaries, often Islamist, 'yearning for a fundamental remodelling of the state', including its coercive apparatus.62 On the other stood the coalition that congealed around Field Marshal Haftar: offering order and some degree of continuity with the (neglected) armed forces of the *jamahiriya* albeit lacking even Gaddafi's rhetorical radicalism.

The field marshal aspired to a counter-revolution on the Egyptian model. This would be a political counter-revolution, based on the army and directed against the political Islamists who had benefitted from the fall of the old regime. Lacking any kind of social programme – not even the pseudo-Nasserism of a Sisi – Haftar was able to attract support from both Cyrenaican monarchists, chafing at the continued postrevolutionary dominance of Tripolitania, and 'federalists, secessionists, local businesspeople and elements of certain tribes'.63 Those Gaddafiera officials who had joined the revolution but found themselves attacked after 2011 as insufficiently revolutionary or as holdovers of the old regime formed another base of support. Haftar even had his advocates amongst human rights activists expressing the basic desire for order and security run roughshod by the rule of militias and Islamist factions in Benghazi.64 These provided a passive form of support for Haftar's project, the series of campaigns he waged against the Government of National Accord, but his mainstay was the 'Libyan National Army' that he created.

Army officers, leaders of an institution kept weak and divided under Gaddafi, fractured by the 2011 uprising and humiliated by the rise of unprofessional militias, formed the basis of the force. They were joined by former Gaddafi loyalists, bearing the insignia and symbols of the *jamahiriya*, formed a part of the LNA particularly amongst those communities – such as the Tebu of the South-West – singled out by the militias of 2011.65 Haftar appealed to 'veterans of Libya's bureaucracy and military' victimised by the political isolation laws of 2012.66 Following the fall of Gaddafi, 'Local Military Councils', often founded by local military men, sprang up in towns that had stayed neutral during the uprising and civil war.67 Haftar toured the country, building support amongst such councils, especially in towns with particularly strong ties to the old regime 'worried about the emerging new order'.68 Following his successful offensive in the East in 2015, the field marshal appointed these officers and old regime officials as governors and 'allowed hundreds of Gaddafi-era security officials' to return.69 Former regime figures based in Cairo and the UAE lubricated Haftar's search for external support and amplified his accusation that the GNA was dominated by dangerous Islamists.70 These moves were accompanied by accusations of assassinations and illegal detentions by Haftar's *amn al-dakhli* – internal security. Adding to Haftar's forces in the field were Zintani militias which, having captured Tripoli international airport during the war against Gaddafi, were compelled to defend this prize against the forces of the GNC and their Misratan allies in 2014. The Zintani brigades were never entirely under Haftar's command; however, a 'reconciliation agreement' reached between

them and their Misratan opponents in 2018 pointedly supported a 'civilian state' and opposed the return of military rule as envisaged by Haftar.71

The adhesive for Haftar's coalition of support – never generating the kind of popular enthusiasm visible in Egypt's *Tamarrod*, for example – was provided by hostility to political Islam, in general, and the Muslim Brotherhood and its offshoots, in particular. More than any abstract 'secularism', this axis held together Haftar's mixture of military and civilian allies. Foremost among the latter was the HoR and its government in al-Bayda. This government recognised Haftar's LNA as the national army – although it would be more accurate to describe the HOR as the legislature of the Libyan National Army. The HoR 'passed a flurry of decrees' demonstrating the body was, in the views of its opponents', 'too close to counter-revolutionary forces': among these were the re-enlistment of retired Gaddafi-era military officers and the suspension of the Political Isolation Law.72 Haftar and the HoR's base remained nonetheless narrow, obliging the field marshal to rely extensively on their outside patrons.

Yemen

As in Libya, the years of civil war which followed Yemen's revolutionary situation belie any easy distinction between revolutionary and counterrevolutionary forces. From 2014 onwards, the country was split into two broad territories mapping onto the former territories of the (Northern) Yemeni Arab Republic and the (Southern) People's Democratic Republic of Yemen – yet neither of these blocs represented a simply regionalist bloc. The North was dominated by the alliance of the Houthis and the former dictator Ali Abdullah Saleh and the remnants of his party, the GPC: the South by the government formed under Saleh's former deputy Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi in 2011, in alliance with *Islah* party and the Southern secessionist movement, the *hiraak.* Both coalitions, therefore, brought together part of the old regime, Islamist militias of different denominations, and formerly excluded regionally based movements (the Houthis in the North and the *hiraak* in the South), which had supported the revolution of 2011. The picture would become even more confusing after 2017, when the Houthis assassinated their ally Saleh, and the *hiraak* became increasingly restive – eventually announcing Southern autonomy in 2020.

The origins of this thicket of alliances lay, however, in the counterrevolutionary strategy adopted in 2011. As noted earlier, this strategy was based on the broader spread of the Yemeni ruling regime – aiming at its preservation as a system while removing the objectionable head of that system, Saleh. This was the substance of the agreement reached in November 2011. As noted earlier, Saleh had relied upon the Northern sheikhs empowered by the anti-*saᶜada* revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, and increasingly after the 1990s on Sunni Islamists connected to *Islah* and the Al-Ahmar leaders of the Hashid confederation. The uprising of 2011 was directed against this old regime of 'Salih, his family, the GPC, the Hashid tribal confederation, Islahi conservatives, the northern security apparatus and the entrenched corrupt bureaucracy'.73 To end the revolutionary situation brought about by that uprising, the GCC transition agreement preserved the overall regime only with the figurehead removed. In this sense,

it was a counter-revolution. The agreement favoured Saleh's allies Hadi and *Islah* and his internal rival Ali Mohsen

Ahmar at the old dictator's expense.74 Neither reflected either the demands or the personnel of the revolutionary movement from below, which the agreement was designed to divert 'away from...comprehensive social changes' towards a shuffling of personnel.75 The civil war was the result of the breakdown of this agreement as the former demands went unmet – the fractions of the old regime party to the agreement then attracting those excluded from it, the Houthis and the *hiraak.*

Saleh's curious (and in the end, fatal) alliance with the Houthis demonstrate the passage from counter-revolution to multipolar civil war. Saleh, and his remaining clientele still organised in the GPC, was dissatisfied with the GCC agreement because of the one demand of the revolutionary movement it partially achieved: his removal from power. The Houthis articulated the opposition to the agreement because of what it did *not* achieve: the kind of redistribution of resources and executive power promised by the National Dialogue Conference between 2013 and 2014. As one Houthi supporter, Sheikh Ali Wajaman, characterised the movement's position – '[t]he Yemeni people are against the entire corrupt old regime, not just one person [Saleh]. But thus far the GCC initiative has preserved the same pattern of corruption. The transition has been a time of dividing the spoils between traditional forces [GPC, JMP and their allies]'.76 Within the National Dialogue conference, the Houthis 'developed a political wing...[including] a handful of leftist and liberal thinkers' and promoted an agenda in line with the demands of 'women, youth and civil society representatives'. The ascendancy of the Houthis was even welcomed by some activists as weakening the dominance of the Ahmars cemented by the 2011 agreement.77

If the actual practice of the Houthis in their strongholds was more repressive than the face they presented in Sana'a, the primary source of their attraction was the counter-revolutionary nature of the 2011 GCC agreement.78 The breakdown of this agreement, intertwining religious revivalist and regionalist movements with fractions of the old regime, both exacerbated and resulted from the process of sectarianisation, visible elsewhere in the region as a response to the 2011 uprisings. The optic of a general Sunni-Shi'a regional conflagration particularly – invoked by combatants and observers alike – is particularly ill-suited to Yemen's post-revolutionary wars, however.

The population in Yemen is often enumerated as 30–40 per cent Zaydi Shi'a (mainly in the North) and 60–70 per cent Shafe'i Sunnis (mainly in the South). Yet to characterise the Zaydis simply as 'Shi'a' is as useful as to call all monophysite Christians 'Catholic'.79 Zaydism shares common ancestry with the Twelver Shi'ism dominant of Iran, Lebanon and Southern Iraq but its doctrines, practices and institutions – the idea of a ruling imamate that can nonetheless be challenged by any *sayyid* on the grounds of impiety or injustice – render it as distinct from mainstream Twelverism as from any of its Sunni counterparts.80 Yemen's Muslims long retained the historically far more meaningful everyday distinction between schools of jurisprudence and conduct (*madhahib*) rather than the abstract divide between Sunni and Shi'a. Members of the

Zaydi *madhhab* might pray in a Sunni mosque and vice versa. Only with the imposition of a notionally universal legal code and the rise of Salafi movements rejecting previous jurisprudential authority did Shafe'ism and Zaydism come to be understood as sub-representatives of larger 'sects'.81

Only in understanding sect as a political and material practice rather than an inherent identity can the imbrications of Yemen's post-2011 alliances be navigated. Ali Abdullah Saleh, like his enemies-turned-allies the Houthis, was a Zaydi. His allies-turned-enemies Ali Mohsen alAhmar, Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi and the Al-Ahmar leaders of Islah were Sunnis, but the latter hail from a historically Zaydi tribe and clan, their 'conversion' to Sunnism being one of political rather than doctrinal identification.82 Saleh, despite having allied himself with Sunni Islamists in his series of wars against the Houthis, characterised (inaccurately) the protests of 2011 as the work of Shafe'is and warned that he could be the 'last Zaydi president'.83 As the alliance with the Houthis fell apart in 2017, however, Saleh and the GPC presented the Houthis 'in much the same way it views Islah, an intolerant religion-based political organisation with ties to foreign actors – ...Iran,[or] in Islah's case Qatar and chapters of the Muslim Brotherhood'.84

Saleh relied upon Islamist trends in his battle with the former 'socialist orientation' of the South, making Islah and its leaders the Al-Ahmars partners in the post-unification state. The compact between them was never a fully settled one. Ali Mohsen's faction of the army was closer to the 'Sunni' forces of Islah and the Al-Ahmars, and not averse to the deployment of armed Salafists belonging to Al-Qaeda and others: the latter also serving, at times, as a card in Saleh's hands in his relations with Washington.85 Part of this policy was to permit in the 1990s and 2000s the spread of Salafist proselytisation in the northern Zaydi heartland. Houthism was a response to this encroachment, a counter-revivalism that grew in appeal as the 'state-shaykhs' increasingly neglected their client constituencies.86 After 2011, these tendencies were exacerbated as the two camps attracted and recruited fighters on the novel basis of identification of their enemies as 'twelver' Shi'a or 'takfiri' Sunnis.87

A similar degree of caution must be exercised in identifying the factions of the post-revolutionary war in Yemen with particular tribes. The tribe, as in Libya, cannot be ignored as a part of Yemeni political life, certainly not in the North. As in Libya, however, it is best to consider Yemen's *qaba'il* as practices and networks rather than unified actors in their own right. A tribe might provide a mobilising system of patronage and potential support – as well as rules of conduct – but sheikhs did not govern their tribes in any sense. Still less do conflicts occur 'between' tribes-as-units. Saleh and his great rival, Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, in fact belonged to the same sub-tribe, the Sanhan, of the larger confederation, the Hashid, presided over by Abdullah al-Ahmar, the effective leader of the Islah party. The Houthi wars of the 2000s frequently pitched members of the same tribal confederation against one another, even if kinship ties also served to mobilise fighters.88

With these caveats in mind, how then were the forces of the Hadi administration and its allies able to build a base of their own? Mobilisation through the political networks of Islah and the (somewhat weakened) tribal ones of the Hashid federation – the two never entirely distinct – played a part. These forces had already split off significant chunks of the army in 2011.89 Hadi's allies amongst armed Islamist factions extended both to Saudi-backed Salafists – for a time al-Qaeda in the Arabia Peninsula were certainly fighting with, if not for, Hadi's cause.90 The equivalent of Saleh's alliance with the Houthis was to be found in the Hadi regime's alliance with militias of the Yemeni Socialist Party and the Southern *Hiraak* – their 'widely decentralised' 'movements and militias' forming 'the majority of the Southern fighters'.91

This alliance of a previously excluded regionalist movement with a fraction of the old regime mirrored the Houthis' relationship of convenience with Saleh. Here, however, the relevant political inheritance came not from the anti-*sa ada* revolution of the 1960s and 1970s but that of the PDRY and its dissolution. The initial unification of the People's Democratic and the Arab republics of Yemen in 1990 descended, as we have seen, in the civil war of 1994 that produced an effective situation of Northern dominance. By the time of the uprising in 2011, the Southern movement against that dominance had already been protesting for several years against what its activists perceived as an 'occupation'.92 The various factions of the *hiraak*, including to some degree the stillextant YSP, participated in the movement of 2011 and even agreed at first not to raise demands or symbols of Southern autonomy. The GCC agreement and subsequent process of national dialogue alienated the *hiraak*, however. The Hadi administration made only one concession to Southern demands, an apology for the 1994 war.93 Proposals for federalism foundered in the NDC: the option of two strong regions (favoured by the *hiraak* and the Houthis) was outdone by the proposal for six weak regions and a strong centre.94

This breakdown expressed a deeper division, reflecting both the inheritance of the PDRY and the experience of the South after unification. One *hiraak* activist put the point '[w]e [the *hiraak*] do not accept the entire framework for the NDC, because we do not accept the existence of the Republic of Yemen'. Ali Salim al-Beidh, the last president of the PDRY, drew a similar distinction in terms of the depth of the revolutionary processes in the North and South: power in Sanaa is built on...the tribes, the military and takfiri religion...not peaceful and democratic forces capable of building a civil state. There has been no change since Saleh left power; the same powers rule the North. There was no real revolution there, unlike the real revolution that is happening in the South95

Despite such views, the militias of the *hiraak* ended up fighting on the same side as these 'same powers'. Saleh having declared in September 2013 that 'a federal state based on two entities is treason', the *hiraak* sided with his enemies when the NDC broke down.96 Hadi's allies did their best to call on notions of the Houthis as monarchical reactionaries seeking the return of the Imamate and *sa ada* supremacy, but for the Southern movement the problem was Northern dominance *tout court*.97 Once

the Houthis and their allies entered Aden, the Southern movement responded to a greater perceived threat: no great proponents of Hadi, they nonetheless preferred tactical alliance with a weakened Northern administration than a strong one. This fragile coalition, drawing together Hadi's government, Islah and its associated militias, Salafi fighters and the *hiraak* was united only by common antipathy to the Houthis.98 The source of its unlikely persistence for five years lay not in Yemen in itself but in the predominant role of external counter-revolution – to which we now turn.

Counter-Revolution from Without

Of all the Arab counter-revolutions after 2011, Libya and Yemen were the most internationalised. Where the Syrian and Bahraini regimes could rely on external back for counter-revolutions they pursued in their own right, Libya and Yemen became the battlegrounds for contending regional counter-revolutionary alliances seeking to remake the post2011 order of the Middle East in their own image.

These alliances were by no means uniform across the region. Saudi Arabia and the UAE formed the strategic core of the main counterrevolutionary axis in both Yemen and Libya: pursuing direct intervention in the former and fostering Field Marshal Haftar's forces (backed up with air strikes) in the latter. Around this central axis revolved lesser allies. The Sisi regime in Cairo also extended air support to its Libyan epigone, while Turkey and Qatar sent forces of their own to shore up Haftar's enemies. Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Russia – at odds in the Syrian theatre – found themselves on the same side in Yemen and Libya, with both Moscow and Paris providing extra-regional cover for Haftar's offensives. Iran, predominant on the ground in Syria, pursued at most an arms-length interest in Yemen and remained largely absent from Libya. The premise of this pursuit of multiple counter-revolutionary projects was the decline, not the reinforcement, of the US position in the region.99 Contrary to interpretations of the Arab uprisings as a continuation of Washington's regime-change policies of the mid-2000s, NATO intervention in Libya marked the endpoint rather than the return of such a strategy. Once Gaddafi was removed, Western intervention in the country (mainly French rather than American) concentrated on supporting Haftar's attempt to rebuild a military state rather than any form of democratisation. Rather than a uniform push for regime change from Washington, the Arab revolutions produced three broad camps, which then formed the basis for the shifting alliances that confronted each other in Libya and Yemen. Two of these would oppose outright any form of revolution, political or social, at least in states they considered within their orbit. These were the two camps associated with Saudi Arabia on one side and Iran on the other. Supporting political, but not social revolutions, was a third, comprising Turkey, Qatar and most affiliates of the Muslim Brotherhood. How did these axes come to clash in Libya and Yemen?

Libya

Libya provides the strongest case for continuity between the early 2000s policies of external regime change and the Arab revolutions. Yet even here the shifting pattern of external intervention – uniting the foremost proponent of the 2011 NATO intervention, France, with its greatest opponent Russia, as well as the UAE, Sisi's Egypt and Saudia

Arabia – demonstrated that counter-revolution rather than democratisation was the dominant objective of the new regional and international order.

The uprising in 2011 at first opposed foreign intervention.100 The NTC changed this position because they saw the military advantage of Western airpower – but also because the strategy was favoured by the 'elitist' leadership detached from the 'hitherto uncoordinated popular movement'.101 The *jamahiriya* was already cracking apart because of the uprising before the NATO campaign began: the bombing was an intervention into the revolution, not its cause. The UN resolutions 1970 (authorising travel ban, sanctions and an arms embargo) and UNSC 1973 (authorising armed force) were made on the basis of Chapter 7 of the UN charter, not the untested doctrine of the 'Responsibility to Protect'.102 The latter resolution passed by ten votes with five abstentions because China and Russia were unwilling to veto it. The Libyan regime never enjoyed the kind of patronage Moscow extended to his counterpart in Damascus. Not just Sergei Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, but Hamas in Gaza and then Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad condemned the regime's response to the protests in Benghazi.103 Nonetheless, both the resolution and the bombing campaign were advanced by prominent supporters of the doctrines of regime change and humanitarian intervention such as Bernard Henri-Levy and the faction around Hilary Clinton in the US administration.104

Yet in other ways the bombing campaign differed markedly from the 'forward strategy of freedom' pursued in Afghanistan and Iraq a decade earlier: most obviously the existence of an indigenous mass uprising against the regime. Also crucial was the difference in the strategic sponsors of the campaign. It was France and the UK who pushed most strongly for military action and who carried it out. The United States hardened considerably the original draft of UNSC 1970, adding the language about the protection of civilians that would permit the bombing of ground targets rather than just a 'no-fly zone' but did not take the lead in the operation. France conducted a third of the air sorties, the UK slightly more than a fifth and the United States slightly less.105 Even once the bombing began, however, the Americans took a secondary role – Clinton leaving the French ambassador to Washington in no doubt that '[y]ou are not going to drag us into your shitty war... We'll be obliged to follow and support you, and we don't want to'.106

The evident hypocrisy of the bombing campaign – France and Qatar breaking the arms embargo they had themselves imposed and NATO jets leaving untouched opposition militias when they too committed atrocities such as those against the Tawergha – undoubtedly called up memories of regime change in Iraq. Yet after NATO ceased its operations in Libya on the 31st of October 2011, the NTC rejected any continued foreign presence. The council was chided for this stance by both President Obama – who recommended 'a much more aggressive effort to rebuild societies that didn't have any civic traditions [sic]'– and his representative to NATO Ivo Daalder – 'just because you give people the opportunity to decide their own future they don't always decide in the right or best way – in the way that we would have wanted'.107

Far more consequential were the outside powers assembled behind Field Marshal Haftar. Foremost among these were the UAE, shortly followed by Saudi Arabia: the Emirates pursuing its objective of eliminating any force in the region tinged with the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood and its agenda of popular electoral participation. In this endeavour the UAE found a natural ally in post-2013 Egypt, as the Sisi regime seeking to expand its own counter-revolution beyond its borders.108 The UAE and Egypt were reported already to have conducted air strikes against 'Libya Dawn targets' in August of 2014.109 Libyan Political Agreement of late 2015 foundered partly on this support: its provisions included potential restraints on Haftar's power that he was disinclined to accept and had no need to do so because of the support he received from outside powers. Haftar's renewed assault on Tripoli in 2019 was preceded by his meeting Prince Mohammed Bin Salman of Saudi Arabia and receiving tens of millions of dollars to fund his campaign.110 The UAE concentrated on the more direct provision of 'essential military technology' and the release of $10 billion of frozen Libyan funds to the field marshal.111

Far from promoting a continuing agenda of regime change and statebuilding, by 2019 the major extra-regional powers had all swung behind Haftar's counter-revolution. The US, UK and Italy initially supported the Government of National Accord as it emerged from the dialogue they pressured Libyan players to pursue.112 France – the strongest proponent of the original campaign under a rubric of humanitarian intervention – had already begun to provide diplomatic support to Haftar by this point. The United States shifted its position to support for Haftar under the Trump administration, support that was further strengthened with the intercession of Mohammed Bin Salman on the Field Marshal's behalf in

2019.113 This move placed the United States and Russia in the same camp. Moscow having staked its fortunes on Haftar since 2016 and offering to 'provide us [the LNA] with anything we need...on any terms we want'.114 This arrangement extended to the printing of $10bn worth of Libyan dinars at a Russian mint to fund Haftar's forces and the HoR.115 By the time of Haftar's renewed offensive on Tripoli in 2019, even the UK had to come to reconsider its 2011 operation.116 The 2011 intervention marked no return of the policy of regime change in the region but rather its last gasp. Scant years after the fall of Gaddafi, the international community – with a few exceptions such as Turkey and Qatar – fell firmly behind the counter-revolutionary military campaign that sought to reinstate parts of his regime.

What were the aims and methods of those exceptions? Qatar began its intervention in Libya early providing manpower, aerial support and finances to the revolutionary militias in 2011. Doha pursued the most aggressive anti-Gaddafi line amongst the Arab League states, Sheikh alThani even going so far as to co-author an op-ed with UK Prime Minister David Cameron making the case for the intervention in *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*. Qatar acted as the middleman for – illegal – oil sales for the NTC establishing a divided authority over Libya's hydrocarbon wealth that would prove the fulcrum of renewed conflict in 2014 and 2018. As elsewhere in the region, Qatar extended its support

to those Libyan politicians associated with the Muslim brotherhood and the 'Libya Dawn' militias with whom they allied themselves – accusations of Qatari support for Takfiri groups such as *Ansar al-Shari'a* notwithstanding. Qatar became the strongest international backer of the GNC and then the Government of National Accord.

The alliance between Turkey, Qatar and the GNC and its successor in the GNA developed only after the fall of Gaddafi. Although a NATO member, Ankara opposed the bombing campaign – Erdogan referring to it as a 'nonsense' and a 'crusade'.117 Turkey was the only state that actually enforced the arms embargo on Misrata.118 Once the regime had been overthrown, however, Turkey's ruling AKP saw an opportunity to pursue its model of electoral Islamism combined with economic neoliberalism.119 The emergence of Field Marshal Haftar threatened this project and provoked a stronger Turkish response: by 2019, Ankara was sending ground forces, including defeated militias from northern Syria, to fight off Haftar's offensive.

Yemen

The headquarters of the Yemeni counter-revolution were to be found not in the country itself but in the Gulf. More than even the contending fractions of the old regime around Ali Abdallah Saleh and AbdRabbuh Mansur Hadi, the driving force behind the project to reverse, divert or repress Yemen's revolutionary uprising came from Riyadh and Abu Dhabi. This counter-revolution passed through three phases: the GCC sponsorship of the November 2011 deal designed to preserve the regime by removing Saleh; outright military intervention after 2015 with the breakdown of that deal and the entry of the Houthis into Sana'a; and the subsequent fracturing of this intervention into internecine fighting of its own between clients of the UAE and Saudi Arabia in 2019. Other powers – notably the US backing Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and Iran extending more limited support to the Houthis – were not absent from the conflict but played a lesser role.

The centrality of Saudi Arabia to the Yemeni counter-revolution, in particular, reflected a long-standing anxiety in Riyadh concerning its populous, poor, republican and (comparatively) more democratic southern neighbour. Whether in the form of the republican and nationalist revolution of the 1960s, the Left national liberation struggle to found the PDRY or the 'democratic values and women's empowerment' of 2011, the prospect of an alternative form of rule to conservative monarchy on the Arabian peninsula was a troubling one to the Sauds.120 Having fought and lost a war to preserve the Imamate by 1972, Riyadh spent the following four decades cultivating the new ruling class of the Yemen Arab Republic as both a bulwark against the PDRY and as an extension of the Sauds' own patronage system across the porous frontier. Particularly in the North West (later the Houthi heartland), the Saudi's disbursed large amounts to local sheikhs who also 'merged into new business elites, which in part relied on state contracts for their business'.121 Direct 'personal account payments to military commanders, politicians, tribal sheikhs and other figures' from the Saudi Ministry of Interior knitted the kingdom into the web of relations amongst Yemen's composite ruling class – not merely as an outside influence but a component in its

own right.122 Saudi promotion of Salafi activities in this traditionally Zaydi heartland formed another avenue of influence.123

The outbreak of a revolutionary uprising in Yemen in 2011 threatened, as in Egypt, not just the stability of a neighbouring state but a social order in which Saudi Arabia was already deeply embedded. Unlike Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the GCC sought to manage the smooth removal of Saleh once it had become clear that his repressive tactics were both encouraging further revolutionary mobilisation and an unsustainable split in the ruling elite. The GCC's efforts began in the spring of 2011 but Saleh proved recalcitrant – relenting only after a spell convalescing in Saudi Arabia from the severe injuries he suffered from a bomb attack on his presidential compound in June of that year. The agreement protected the system of patronage and pro-Saudi alignment built up under Saleh while removing the man himself in a new, internationally recognised government. As noted earlier, the agreement was based on the shared interest of the JMP opposition leaders – especially Islah – and the fractions of the regime outside of Saleh's circle in diverting the revolutionary movement. The signing ceremony in Riyadh was 'witnessed by Gulf royalty and some Western diplomats – but none of the Yemenis who had called for his [Saleh's] removal'.124

This diplomatic form of counter-revolution would be transformed into full military intervention as the GCC-sponsored compact broke down in 2014. As the talks of the National Dialogue Conference faltered, and the Houthis renewed their rebellion in alliance with the now-returned Saleh, Saudi Arabia and the UAE turned to military means to uphold the 2011 settlement. Alarmed at the Houthis' southward progress into Aden, Saudi Arabia and the UAE launched 'Operation Decisive Storm' in March 2015. The campaign marked the ascendancy of the most hardline opponents of any form of mass democracy in the region: Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman of Saudi Arabia and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed of Abu Dhabi. This counter-revolutionary core would act with utmost force and independently of the GCC's accustomed patrons in Washington – pursuing a region-wide strategy of isolating Iran, repressing the Muslim Brotherhood, and shutting down any form of democratic opening.125

This intervention thus both sectarianised and further militarised the conflict, drawing forces from wide range of Sunni to which Riyadh and Abu Dhabi appealed on explicitly anti-Iranian grounds, painting the Houthis as a peninsular Hizballah. Although the bulk of the fighting – and aerial bombardment – was done by Saudi Arabia, Emirati and Yemeni forces, the operation called on nine other states, including Qatar, Sudan and even Senegal.126 The Saudi-Emirati campaign was characterised by siege and aerial bombardment, not dissimilar to that carried out by Russia and the Assad regime in Syria. As a result, 60 per cent of the population, some 17 million people, required urgent food assistance to stave off famine by 2017.127 Saudi Arabia also provided some $3bn to the Yemeni central bank, while Yemen's limited oil revenues were channelled through the Riyadh-based Al-Ahli bank. The Saudis also took the opportunity to reinforce their hold over shipping lanes and logistical choke-points in the Red

Sea: taking over the ports of Midi and Ghaydha, and forming a 'Red Sea alliance' of Egypt, Djibouti, the Hadi government in Aden, Somalia, Sudan, and Jordan.128

Although sharing a counter-revolutionary objective, Operation Decisive Storm was not without internal rivalries. The Qatari-Turkish axis was almost absent from the field, and their favoured allies, the Muslim Brotherhood and its local associates, fell under the protection of the normally hostile Saudi kingdom as part of *Islah*. This policy contradicted the usual hostility Riyadh displayed towards MB in the rest of the region and clashed with the UAE's more consistent policy of excluding and repressing the organisation. This tactical difference combined with the division of Yemen into zones of Saudi and Emirati influence to produce the confrontation between Hadi's forces and the Southern movement. The UAE concentrated its operations in the south. By 2018, the Emirates had taken over the ports of Mukalla, Aden, Mokha, and the oil terminal at Al-Shihr–and all but annexed the island of Socotra. In areas under their control, Emirati forces and their allies opposed *Islah* and favoured the *hiraak* militias.129 This produced the split in the GCC/Hadi coalition that allowed the 'Southern Transitional Council' to declare independence in 2020.

The United States backed the GCC operation initially with some public misgivings. The 2011 transition agreement in Yemen, with the figurehead of the old regime eased out in favour of a deputy seen in Washington as a more reliable partner against al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, was a model the US would have liked to see implemented elsewhere in the region.130 When Riyadh and Abu Dhabi launched their military intervention to preserve that agreement, therefore, the Obama administration continued to provide air-to-air refuelling and repair services the GCC air forces could not carry out on their own.131 The Trump administration from 2017 turned to a more full-throated support, swinging the United States behind the outright counter-revolutionary project of Bin Salman and Bin Zayed. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo endorsed the Saudi view of the Houthis as Iranian proxies, telling a Senate subcommittee in 2019 'if you truly care about Yemeni lives, you'd support the Saudi-led effort to prevent Yemen from turning into a puppet state of the corrupt, brutish Islamic Republic of Iran'. Under Trump, according to one 'Gulf official', US intelligence provided co-ordinates for raids on Houthi targets.132 The Trump administration pushed ahead in 2019 with authorising $8.1 billion worth of arms sales to Saudi Arabia, making use of the alleged 'emergency' threat posed by Iran to do so.133 US activists succeeded in getting the House of Representatives in 2018 to pass a 'war powers' resolution, which would have forced the Trump administration to provide legal justification for its support for Decisive Storm.134 Although vetoed by President for the remainder of his term, the resolution bore fruit upon the transition to the Biden administration in 2021 with the announcement that the US would end 'support for offensive operations' in Yemen.135

The constellation of counter-revolutionary circuits in Yemen was thus quite different to that evident in Syria or Libya. Moscow, Riyadh and Washington, found at various points on different sides of Syria's civil wars formed a common bloc behind the Hadi

administration – extending to the printing of billions of Yemeni riyals in Russian mints, just as similar provision was extended to Haftar's forces in Libya.136 The Iranian regime, while certainly favouring the Houthis and the damage they could inflict on their Saudi rivals, seems to have played a more aspirational rather than operational role for Ansar Allah. A solid land mass of GCC states separated the Yemeni theatre from Iran or its allies. The Houthis certainly supported the Iranian interpretation of the postuprising Middle East as a battleground between the 'axis of resistance'– including the Lebanese Hizballah and Bashar al-Assad – and the forces of 'imperialism and Zionism'. The Houthis proved quite capable of launching drone and missile attacks inside Saudi Arabia, including on the most important oil installations.137 Hizballah allowed the Houthi TV station Al-Masira to broadcast on their satellite channel – and there is some evidence that Iranian ships seized in 2013 and 2015 may have contained weaponry bound for the Houthis.138 Nonetheless, the situation was quite unlike that in Syria, where the Islamic Republic could easily funnel men and materiel from its allies and clients on either side of the country, in Iraq and Lebanon.

Conclusion

The fate of the Yemeni and Libyan revolutions after 2011 may seem to vindicate the view of the Arab uprisings as initiating simply the collapse of the regional states system into a bloody welter of sectarian, tribal and geopolitical conflict – exacerbated by the democratising delusions of Western powers. Although this collapse was all too real, the lens of revolution and counter-revolution reveals its origins in the intertwining of counter-revolution from above, below and without albeit in even more complex forms than the other uprisings.

First of all, the Yemeni and Libyan revolutions produced consciously counter-revolutionary actors. In Yemen, these were grouped, confusingly, around the transitional government that replaced the old dictator Saleh and sought to maintain the old regime without its figurehead. It was ongoing mass dissatisfaction that led to the collapse of this arrangement and to the strange alliance of fractured sections of the old elite (around Hadi on one side and Saleh on the other) with these excluded and dissatisfied elements – the Houthis with latter and the Southern *hiraak* with the former. In Libya, Field Marshal Haftar aspired to a counter-revolution on the Egyptian model, moulded out of the remnants of the Libyan army and those alienated by the Islamist-dominated GNC and their militia allies. At core, however, this was not a conflict between Islamists and secularists but between those who wanted to retain part of the old state and those who sought its complete overhaul.

In both states, external counter-revolution played a predominant role. Yemen and Libya shared the distinction of being most subject to the military interventions of the Saudi-UAE counter-revolutionary axis. This regional alliance forged the 2011 transition agreement in Yemen and then fought a devastating air campaign to maintain it. In Libya, the initial NATO intervention – apparently recalling the 'regime change' doctrines of the previous decade – gave way to openly counter-revolutionary backing of Haftar by the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Russia and France. The difference with

Yemen lay in the more extensive presence of Turkey and Qatar, seeking to maintain the last redoubt of their strategy of promoting political, rather than social, revolution under Islamist leadership.

Libya and Yemen were states that decomposed under the blows of revolution and external intervention. What then of those areas where, in the only instances of the typically classical criterion of a successful revolution, new 'states' of a kind were founded? The only two of these to emerge after 2011 did so in northern Syria, where they became protagonists in a globalised war: ISIS and the autonomous cantons of 'Rojava'.

7. Revolutionary States? ISIS and Rojava

If revolution means the destruction of old states and the founding of new social orders, then only two projects in the Middle East since 2011 are commonly taken to fit the bill: the would-be caliphate of the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) and the 'democratic confederalist' cantons established in northern Syria or Western Kurdistan/'Rojava'. The ideological co-ordinates of these two contenders to replace the Assad regime in fragments of northern and eastern Syria could not be more different. ISIS represented the most hardened version of the politics of insurrectionary Sunni Islamism, with roots in the thought of the intellectual progenitor of that trend, Sayyid Qutb. Openly sectarian and fundamentally anti-democratic, ISIS aspired to a global caliphate enacting its particularly repressive form of male and Sunni supremacy. Democratic confederalism in Rojava, under the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its militia, the People's Protection Units (YPG), presented itself as an evolution of the 'Marxist-Leninist' politics of (Kurdish) national liberation into a form of post-national libertarian socialism. Officially embracing gender equality and ecological renewal, the PYD attracted much praise and attention from the European and Atlantic Left – including some armed volunteers – but sought no means of expansion far beyond the traditional boundaries of Kurdistan. The conflict between these two entities, a *Glaubenskrieg* reminiscent of the revolutions of the twentiethcentury revolutions rather than twenty-first, drew in the outside intervention of the United States and Turkey – interventions that would result in the extinction of both of these projects.

How far should we consider these projects revolutionary, and what was their relation to the counter-revolutions in Syria and the wider region? Both seem examples of the classical, transformative form of revolution otherwise absent in the region after 2011: novel state forms based on unified ideological perspectives at odds with the existing order, and brought to power by violent and extra-institutional means. As is discussed later, ISIS in particular has been presented as the revolutionary *telos* of the uprisings of 2011 – an equivalent of the Jacobin Year II or the Bolshevik October.1 In this chapter, I will argue to the contrary. ISIS, although certainly novel, violent and universalist, prosecuted a counterrevolution in Syria. Concentrating only on ISIS' worldview and enforcement of its project is to see only an attempted revolution from above and not the revolution from below that was crushed by it. ISIS was counterrevolutionary not because it was a tool of the Assad regime – of which they were ambiguous enemies but never simply agents – but because it sought violently to *preserve*, not overturn, the

existing social relations. For that reason, ISIS' first targets were the revolutionaries of 2011 and the alternative structures they had created, not the regime those revolutionaries sought to replace. The PYD, by contrast, did pursue a programme of alternative social relations: but this 'revolution as transformation', to borrow Asef Bayat's terms, was hampered by its severance from the 'revolution as movement' of 2011.[2] What grounds are there for this contrast?

ISIS – Revolutionary State?

At first sight, the identification of ISIS as revolutionary state – an instance of the violent founding of a new order, constitutive of modernity since at least 1789 – appears uncontroversial.[3] Here, it seemed, was a genuine instance of 'a collective' motivated by an ideological 'tietogether' of 'an idealised past and a utopian future', which sought to 'seize a state quickly and forcibly in order to transform political, economic, and symbolic relations': a revolution, even if 'geared at sustaining rather than overturning existing power relations'.[4] Declaring a 'global caliphate' in July 2014, the self-styled caliphate and its adherents have captured and then lost thousands of square kilometres of territory across the Syrian-Iraqi borderlands, ruling over millions and killing – and occasionally enslaving and torturing – thousands; faced aerial bombing campaigns by both the United States and Russia; established affiliate groups in at least eight countries; and attracted the loyalty of subsidiary *wilayaat* in Libya and the Egyptian Sinai. The message declared by the 'Emir of the Believers', Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi, was a simple one: 'Obey me'.[5]

Where did this apparently new state – modelled on the imagined form of a very old one – come from? The origins of ISIS lay in the insurgency waged by al-Qaeda in Iraq against the post-2003 American occupation of that country and of the predominantly Shi'a government elected in 2005 under US tutelage. Al-Qaeda in Iraq, or to give the full title 'the Organization of the base of Jihad in the Land of the Two Rivers', was founded by the Jordanian petty criminal turned *mujahid* Abu Musab al-Zarqawi: although declaring loyalty to the overall al-Qaeda project led by Ayman al-Zawahiri and Osama Bin Laden, Zarqawi pursued a different strategy in declaring an 'Islamic State' in Iraq in 2006. Alienating the populace with its sectarianism and brutality – and with Zarqawi himself killed by US forces in 2006 – the Islamic State in Iraq was a far denuded force by the time 'intellectual mediocrity' Al-Baghdadi assumed its leadership in 2010.[6]

The fortunes of the organisation were changed by the Syrian uprising. Zawahiri and Bin Laden saw the revolutions of 2011 as an opportunity to be seized, urging the revolutionaries – on whom al-Qaeda's ideologues had no direct influence or even contact – to establish fully Islamic emirates rather than the 'road to hell' of 'half-solutions' such as political democracy.[7] Drawing on the long-standing networks of militants in eastern and northern Syria – who had proved useful to the Assad regime during the American occupation of Iraq – and infused with personnel newly released from the regime's prisons, the Islamic State in Iraq set up a branch in and around Aleppo. This was

'Jabhat al-Nusra', which first began operations in November 2012, eighteen months after the Syrian uprising began. Strategic divisions between the predominantly Syrian

Nusra – which focused on replacing the Assad regime with an indigenous Islamic state – and Baghdadi's simultaneously more global and sectarian ambitions led the organisations to split in 2013. 'The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham', into which Baghdadi unsuccessfully attempted to merge Nusra, was nonetheless fully independent of central al-Qaeda. Pushed back into Iraq by Syrian revolutionaries and opposition factions in early 2014, ISIS seized the Iraqi cities of Mosul, Tikrit and Fallujah in that year and retrenched in the city and governorate of Raqqa. The latter was to become the seat of governance of the new caliphate.

ISIS thus established the central distinguishing criterion of a revolutionary movement: a new state. Moreover, this state was 'as hostile to prevailing international norms' as 'the regimes that emerged during the French, Russian, Chinese, Cuban and Cambodian revolutions', rendering the caliphate simply 'the latest in a long line of state-building revolutionaries'.8 The assumed revolutionary nature of ISIS is predicated upon the ruthless use of this sovereign power to remake the behaviour of both individuals and Syrian and Iraqi society.9 As one ISIS interviewee put it: 'You have a ready project, you should place it on society like a tooth crown and make sure to maintain it'.10 A core group of twenty commanders presided over functions divided by ministry, civilian and military arms and geographical regions: within each region 'new courts, local police forces, and an extensive economic administration' were established while 'taking over the existing education, health, telecom, and electricity systems' often still partially administered by the regime in Damascus.11 The caliphate also paid assiduous attention to tribal relationships in north-eastern Syria – fostering allies and punishing rivals, to replace the previous role of the regime as arbiter and source of patronage.12

The brutal character of ISIS rule is well-attested. In some cases, local residents in ISIS-occupied areas seem to have at least valued having only one militia to deal with – and a predictably repressive rather than inconstant and corrupt one at that.13 Nonetheless, ISIS sought to exclude all other political forces from power in the regions it controlled, including other Islamists, and executed and tortured any who resisted – including 700 members of one tribe, the Shaitat, who fought to liberate Raqqa from the group.14 Women were forced to wear the full face-veil (*niqab*) and only permitted outside with a male 'guardian'; the streets patrolled by the *hisba* (male morality police, a practice borrowed from Saudi Arabia) and *khansa* (the female equivalent). Transgressors and dissenters were publicly executed, in some cases crucified, and in a mark of the conscious cruelty of the group, their decapitated heads stuck on spikes in the main square.15 Those religious minorities ISIS considered beyond the pale – chiefly Alawis and Shi'a – faced death, while Christians were forced to pay *jizya* (poll tax), convert or be killed. Churches were desecrated and transformed into ISIS control centres.16

ISIS' attempt to remake the societies over which it ruled derived from a particular worldview – one which Asef Bayat describes as one of the 'three main ideological

traditions...of "revolution" as a strategy of fundamental change'.17 That worldview belonged to the most significant Islamist thinker of the twentieth century, Sayyid Qutb. Qutb's methods did indeed mark a profound break with the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood to which he belonged, and earlier Salafi. For the latter, the favoured method of Islamising society is to keep one's head down in political matters and seek to influence the surrounding community by exhortation, public piety and implicit or explicit coercion. For the former, the strategy pursued by the Brotherhood in Egypt, for example, the correct strategy was to embed a political strategy in a particular social base, gradually increasing one's strength inside and outside the state in a reformist manner.

Qutbism and its descendants are characterised rather by a synthesis of the excluded elements of both these methods. It proposes a political program and condemns the existing society as in a state of pre-Islamic ignorance (*jahiliyya)* brought about by the cultural intrusion of Western imperialism. The answer to this degeneration is not to seek a social base within the society thus corrupted but to flee from it, in metaphorical if not physical terms, and establish a vanguard that takes Islam as its ruling point of reference – only then to return and Islamise it by means of both preaching and physical force. Qutb took this logic to its final point, proposing *takfir wa-l-hijira* 'anathema and exile' as one of the early groups espousing this worldview was known, from the society that had allowed itself to be so corrupted. Given the perfection of God's revelation, in Qutb's view, political power itself had to be overthrown by the violent jihad. The state usurps the sovereignty of God. Once removed, no (Muslim) human being will be superior or inferior to another, for all will obey His law without intercession. For Qutb, Islam is revolutionary: 'a declaration of the freedom of man from servitude to other men...[that] strives from the beginning to abolish all those systems and governments which are based on the rule of man over men and the servitude of one human being to another'.18 Other revolutions, being based on the mobilisation of exploited classes, were tainted by partiality and hence injustice – unlike the 'prophet-led movements', which are led only by the perfection of God's revelation. Islam in this vision is indeed a utopia to brought about by a vanguard modelled on the first companions of the prophet.

Comparison with the views of Hassan al-Banna, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, could not be starker: '[t]he Brotherhood does not believe in revolution and does not rely on it in achieving its goals, and if it happened, we would not adopt it'.19 Sayyid Qutb was not a religious scholar but rather a polymathic thinker and critic belonging to the post-colonial intelligentsia employed in the civil service: his ideas were developed in tandem with, and response to, the revolutionary traditions of anti-colonial nationalism and insurrectionary Marxism, both of which presented revolution as a matter of end-goal rather than process.20 These ideas underwent further mutations after his execution, on charges of attempting to assassinate Nasser, in 1966. The oil boom of the 1970s promoted a particular fusion of Qutbist Islamism with Saudi Wahhabism:

one that was sharpened by the apparently successful experience of the Afghan jihad against Soviet occupation in the 1980s, the crucial forging ground for al-Qaeda.

Three texts were particularly influential in the transition from al-Qaeda to ISIS: establishing the break from a strategy of global confrontation with the United States and Israel – and therefore in this sectarian and antisemitic worldview, 'Crusaders' and 'Jews'– to building the immediate caliphate. These were *The Essentials of Making Ready for Jihad* by 'Dr. Fadl', a former associate of Zawahiri's; and Abu Bakr Naji's

Introduction to the Jurisprudence of Jihad and *The Management of Savagery*.21 These works were used to justify ISIS' shift of target away from the 'far enemy' of the United States and towards the 'infidel laws' of local rulers and 'infidel principles such as communism and democracy'.22 Jihad against such rulers is presented as a universal and individual obligation on Muslims – a *fard ʿayn* – that will bring about a situation of general chaos in which the Islamic vanguard may triumph. The 'worst chaotic system', writes Naji, is 'far preferable to stability under the system of apostasy'.23

The degree to which this worldview and programme penetrated ISIS' lower cadres is unclear. Yet ISIS' antinomian stance towards all existing regimes, as well as their determination to build a new order using extrainstitutional means, seems to justify seeing the caliphate as the quintessentially revolutionary outcome of 2011. One final aspect of ISIS' practice adds to this side of the balance sheet: their fundamental opposition to the states' system in the Middle East and indeed at large. One of the most infamous propaganda videos of the organisation depicts the 'breaking of the borders': ISIS operatives demolishing the border posts between Syria and Iraq and, therefore, the 'division between the Muslims' that they (inaccurately) identify with the Sykes-Picot agreement. ISIS seek not just the adjustment of borders or even the foundation of new nation-states – such as Palestine or Kurdistan – but rather the abolition of the nationstate itself.24 The caliphate even succeeded for a time in partially erasing the distinction between Syria and Iraq, as well as extending some measure of authority into Libya. For the first time since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the global states system appeared to be challenged not by a state as such but by an armed doctrine. Just as Burke said of the 'regicide' French revolutionary regime, existing states could not but be at war 'not with its conduct, but its existence'. In this regard, ISIS was again true to its Qutbist roots: for Qutb, Islam is the antithesis of the sovereign state because human sovereignty is itself the usurpation of God's dominion, and the illegitimate power from which everyone, everywhere, should be freed.25 ISIS also attracted global followers to its cause: perhaps more than 36,000 from almost half the states of the world (one-sixth from Western countries) as well as operatives carrying out attacks at home.26 ISIS, therefore, according to Stephen Walt, ought to be seen as continuing the pattern of revolutionary states in 'protracted struggle between the new regime and its various antagonists, which ends when the revolutionary government is removed from power...or when the state moderates its revolutionary aims'.27

Confrontation with the outside world was, of course, to be ISIS' downfall. It proved impossible for the caliphate, having declared its omnidirectional jihad, ever to defeat

the enemies it thus attracted. Most consequential of these was the United States. In Iraq, the United States supported a revitalised offensive by the 'popular mobilization forces', mainly Shi'a militias aligned with Iran – the Iraqi army having been shamed by its initial failure to put a fight in 2014 – to retake the lost western third of the country. The struggle was a long one, taking two years finally to retake a devastated Mosul in 2017. In Syria, regime and then Russian forces did turn to mounting some attacks – although not consistently – against ISIS. The main campaign against the caliphate was carried out by United States aerial bombardment backing up the YPG and their allies in the 'Syrian Democratic Forces': Washington deploying ground troops only sparingly. Again, a long campaign was required to dislodge ISIS from its strongholds Raqqa and the North East: by the end of 2017, the organisation had lost 95 per cent of its territory and was reduced to controlling a few villages and roads mopped up by the SDF and US forces in 2019.

Defeat on the battlefield did not necessarily imply ideological retreat, however. If ISIS is an armed doctrine, does this qualify the organisation as a revolutionary one – perhaps the most revolutionary one, in the sense of the scale and ferocity of the transformation attempted, in the region after 2011? The three aspects of ISIS outlined earlier – an insurrectionary conquest of power, the use of the state power thus won to re-mould the subject society, and the inherent conflict with the global and regional order – suggest an answer in the affirmative. Yet I will argue here that, on the contrary, ISIS played a *counter-revolutionary* role in Syria. What evidence could justify such a claim?

ISIS as Counter-Revolution

The notion of ISIS as revolutionary depends upon a particular image of revolutions: as the bloodthirsty creation of utopias. This, in itself, reflects the counter-revolutionary view that sees the mass, popular uprisings characteristic of revolutions as mere disorder, preludes to the unconnected seizure of power by fanatical minorities.28 When force is used to impose a different order – fascist or socialist, Islamist or nationalist – in this view, a revolution has happened. Needless to say, since both revolution and counter-revolution involve force, this view again erases the existence of counter-revolution: '[c]ounterrevolution is revolution...' and to argue otherwise is to impose an unsustainable value judgement as to which violent organisation represents a 'progressive' politics.29 On these grounds are the fascist seizures of power in inter-war Europe, often described as revolutionary and ISIS as a comparable entity.30 Not to recognise such movements – or, indeed, the Islamic turn of the Iranian Revolution – argues Fred Halliday, is to restrict the meaning of revolution to 'progressive' instances.31

As we have seen, mass support is not merely a common feature of counter-revolution but a condition of its success. Previous such examples – such as *Tamarrod* – have aimed at reinstating or protecting the old regime rather than holding as its objective, as ISIS undoubtedly does, its overthrow. In response to the three ways in which ISIS, as an insurrectionary project of a new type of state at odds with both domestic and international order, can nonetheless be considered counterrevolutionary. The first lies in the

relationship organisation and its predecessors were hostile to both the principles and participants of the uprising of 2011 before, during and after it. The political structures they established drew notably more on the Ba'athist inheritance than the organisations of revolutionary self-government. Second, in the content of the project they sought to impose, ISIS sought to preserve rather than overthrow the social relations underlying everyday life: even if this was accompanied by a particularly brutal transformation of that life to 'enjoin the good and forbid the bad'. Third, in its ambiguous relationship with the Assad regime, ISIS served both to eliminate revolutionaries and provide justification for the counter-revolution.

Accounts that see ISIS as revolutionary focus purely on the novelty, universalism and absolutism of the group's ideological project rather than its attitude to the Syrian revolution from below. That attitude, and the policy that sprung from it, was hostile. The first point to note is that ISIS, although a very large militia group, could only ever be considered a very small state – or even political movement. At its height, the group probably commanded 50,000 or so men under arms in Syria, not counting the various ancillaries and lower-level civilian bureaucrats who usually did not belong to ISIS itself.32 The Free Syrian Army at its height, or at least those militias claiming broad allegiance to its umbrella, could claim a strength 50 per cent higher.33 Almost double the number of Syrians disappeared as political prisoners after 2011 as joined ISIS – several multiples more were killed by regime bombardment. As revealed in eyewitness and participant testimony from 2011, a typical demonstration in a provincial town during the uprising would have equalled ISIS' entire fighting force: the largest reported demonstration, in Hama in July 2011would have outnumbered them tenfold. It was the situation of chaotic civil war and the lassitude granted to their growth by the regime's policy of targeting other groups – as well as the determination, organisation and combat skill of their cadres – that permitted such a relatively small group to seize so much territory.

In doing so, ISIS did not empower but rather destroyed the physical, political and cultural infrastructures of the revolution. Rather than take the fight to the regime – as even groups that shared their Qutbist outlook such as Ahrar al-Sham and Jabhat al-Nusra did – ISIS concentrated on dismantling what remained of revolutionary governance in the 'liberated zones' of the rear.34 Among the most common complaints of foreign cadres who joined ISIS was the observation that 'Assad's forgotten about' – in the words of one such recruit – and the organisation was concentrating on eliminating its rivals amongst the opposition.35

It is not unusual, of course, for a future repressive regime to emerge from the ranks of a revolutionary uprising against an old one: such is the content of the cliché that revolutions devour their own children. Yet even if one accepts such a characterisation of, for example, the Jacobins or the Bolsheviks with whom ISIS are often compared, the caliphate stands out. Robespierre and Lenin led currents within the revolutionary uprisings in France and Russia. The intellectual and political movements they represented belonged to the broad trends of thought and action that preceded them. The

Montagnards were members of the structures established by 1789, the Legislative Assembly and National Convention – the Committee of Public Safety being an organ of the latter body. The Jacobins were supported by and responded to the Paris crowd of *sans culottes*, just as the Bolsheviks possessed an undeniable social base in the Russian urban working class. The latter endowed the Bolsheviks with electoral majorities not in the Constituent Assembly of 1918 but in the workers and soldiers' Soviets.

ISIS, by contrast, did not emerge from the revolutionary uprising; rather than represent a trend within the participants of that uprising, they eliminated them; their rise occurred not through but against the alternative political institutions established by the revolution, which they concentrated on destroying rather than attacking the *ancien regime*. The process began with the infiltration of al-Qaeda operatives (then under the banner of Al-Nusra) into areas liberated from the regime. The first infiltrators were few in number, and often brought with them cash, guns and medical relief. The split between ISIS and Nusra revolved around whether to prioritise the fight against the regime or the opposition.36

After its founding as a separate organisation, ISIS began wholesale takeovers not of regime strongholds but of areas liberated from the regime and run by local revolutionary councils. In the town of Saraqeb, site of a particularly active council, ISIS closed the revolutionary media centre and printing press and arrested the relatives of local co-ordination committee members.37 Likewise, the whippings and crucifixions carried out by ISIS in Raqqa in 2013 were of opposition activists, not regime supporters. The group seized power in Raqqa by physically liquidating the local FSA brigade, abducting local revolutionary leaders and executing an outspoken anti-Assad journalist and activists. The same pattern was repeated across ISIS' zones of control: in Tal Abyad, for example, former FSA fighters were required to 'repent' and undergo a year-long period of indoctrination, with a 'guarantor' taken effectively hostage for their good behaviour.38 In Manbij, governed by a revolutionary council that had taken power after a general strike, ISIS expelled and replaced the latter body in 2014, having threatened the lives of its president and members: a further general strike proved incapable of resisting the forces of the Caliphate.39 Even where local courts and administrations were already dominated by Islamists, these were side-lined or disbanded by ISIS as competitors. ISIS did not emerge from the alternative institutions of the revolution: they destroyed them.

To acknowledge this policy of ISIS is not to claim that the Syrian revolution – still less the armed groups that sprung up in its wake – completely lacked authoritarian or sectarian components. Nusra fought beside and with FSA brigades, allowing the embryonic ISIS to incubate within the opposition: fearful of losing Nusra's battlefield prowess against the regime, and apparently accepting the organisation's claim to 'moderation', twenty-nine opposition groups rejected the inclusion of JAN on the US state department list of terrorist networks.40 Where JAN or similar groups such as Ahrar al-Sham imposed their will, however, the opposition they encountered came from the same activists who had opposed the Assad regime.41 The conflict between revolution-

aries and ISIS was made even clearer in early 2014 when a civilian uprising, combined with a military offensive by other (also mainly Islamist) factions, drove the group from Aleppo and surrounding territories.

Although many of ISIS' fighters, and most of its commanders, were not Syrian, the group did attract cadres and brigades from the armed opposition. Often, such fighters moved towards Qutbist positions, having first Islamised the iconography of their units to win private Gulf funding.42 By no means, however, could ISIS be considered an arm even of Syria's Sunni bourgeoisie – which in any case was mostly aligned with the regime. Most ISIS fighters belonged to the pulverised generation of post-invasion Sunni youth in Iraq: in areas like Deir al-Zour, ISIS also offered a regular salary, no small enticement amidst the collapse of provincial livelihoods.43 Even ISIS' commanders, below the very top stratum at least, tended to come from humble rural backgrounds: 'street vendors, farm workers, construction workers, shopkeepers and mechanics'.44

Functioning as a large militia, however, the background of ISIS' members cannot be taken as indicative of their social base. More consequential are the policies they adopted. Were ISIS engaged in the revolutionary overturning of social relations, or their preservation? In one sense, they very clearly sought to create a new order based on the command of extreme violence and excluded from power anyone – including formerly powerful tribal elders – who might have formed a competitor to that order.45 The extraordinary repression and transformation of everyday life presided over by a unified triad of ideology, state and militia calls up resemblances to revolutionary episodes past – the black flags and Quranic injunctions painted all over Raqqa bearing more than a superficial resemblance to the 'large-character slogans' of China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Yet beneath this, admittedly thorough, cultural transformation, social relations were preserved intact, even reliant upon the governance techniques and personnel of Ba'athism. Employees remained employed, the right of property – unless it belonged to members of religious minorities targeted by ISIS' pogroms – protected. ISIS even maintained the management structures, and revenuesharing arrangements, of regime-owned installations in its territory. 'The Islamic state', reports one study, 'attempts to exercise control without having the means to deeply transform existing institutions'.46

Social relations impinge most obviously on states and organisations through their search for funds. ISIS received some of its funding from private Gulf sources: according to congressional testimony on the subject, by 2014 accumulating reserves of about $40 from million such sources.47 This is substantial but only equivalent to about one month of ISIS 2014 earnings from oil sales alone.48 Reliant upon oil rent and local agricultural production, ISIS had to act as other capitalist states must act, to ensure the reproduction of its revenues, and to extract those revenues through taxation and trade.

ISIS levied at least four forms of taxes and duties in its territories: a general *zakat* of 2.5 per cent of income on businesses whose goods are assessed by ISIS auditors; an agricultural tithe of 5 per cent on irrigated and 10 per cent on rain-fed crops; the

jizya, or poll tax, levied on religious minorities or more likely on their property once they have been murdered or expelled; and the cut ISIS would take from transit trade through its territories Transit duties brought in $140 million a year, having built up reserves of $875 million before 2014 and netting a $23 million windfall in the form of taxes on Iraqi civil servants' salaries with the fall of Mosul.49

Oil – dealt with by ISIS' central committee, the *shura*, not by any of the subordinate governorates – garnered the organisation in the region of

$450 million per year. Customers included the Assad regime, the rebel forces, and Turkey – ISIS benefitting from the captive market of the civil war.50 To continue extracting oil meant continuing to enforce the – capitalist – social relations under which that extraction was carried out.

Indeed, it even necessitated running joint ventures with the Assad regime, as in the Tuweinan gas refinery in eastern Syria. ISIS took a 60 per cent cut of the production and gave the remainder to the regime, which continued to pay the workers' salaries and even to dispatch hapless new engineers to the plant. HESCO, the state energy conglomerate run by George Hasawni – a paragon of the regime-linked Syrian bourgeoisie – paid the *jizya* poll tax for its non-Muslim employees. The labour discipline enforced by ISIS was nakedly brutal, based on whipping and summary execution.51

ISIS relied both upon the continuing infrastructure of the (Syrian) Ba'athist state and on the expertise of (Iraqi) Ba'athist officer to maintain its rule. Reliant on the payment and record-keeping infrastructure of the regime to run services such as electricity provision, the caliphate did nothing except 'provide invoices through the Administration of Islamic Services'.52 The techniques of Ba'athist governance also fed directly into ISIS' takeover of Syria's liberated areas. This is unsurprising, given that 'it has been estimated that 30 per cent of senior figures in ISIS' military command are former army and police officers from the disbanded Iraqi security services'.53 Baghdadi himself owed his election as emir to the support of former Ba'athist officers turned al-Qaeda operatives.54 The information-gathering political police of ISIS, the *maktab al-amn* (security office), was based on the Iraqi model and featured 'an important role' for 'erstwhile members of Saddam Hussein's security apparatus'.55 ISIS did not represent a fraction of the Iraqi Ba'ath party, as some of their enemies have claimed, but nonetheless did display a continuity in its mode of governance, not a break.56

ISIS had an ambiguous relationship not only with the remnants of Iraqi Ba'athism but also with its Syrian version. To present ISIS as a tool, or even an ally, of the regime would be inaccurate. Nonetheless, the two did prove useful to one another. As previously noted, the Syrian counterrevolution imprisoned and disappeared tens of thousands of the activists of the uprising while releasing into circulation key figures in the armed Islamist movements, including some who would go on to occupy central roles in ISIS. ISIS was undoubtedly the beneficiary of the process of sectarianisation discussed in previous chapters.

When ISIS seized territory from the FSA and other factions, it was largely spared the bombardment the regime unleashed on hospitals, bakeries, and civilian districts

elsewhere. Where the regime sought to make alternative centres of governance uninhabitable, zones of ISIS control remained relatively unscathed. Until the start of 'Inherent Resolve' in 2014, Assad barely fought ISIS at all: the main clashes were and remain around Deir al-Zour in the far east of the country, a centre of oil production.57 The battle for Palmyra, site of world-renowned archaeological treasures, won the regime a great deal of positive press as protector of international heritage against fundamentalist barbarism. ISIS documents demonstrate collusion between ISIS and Assad to produce precisely this outcome: including an order given shortly before the regime's attempt to retake the site, to 'withdraw all heavy artillery and anti-aircraft machine guns in and around Palmyra province to Raqqa province'.58 Assad and ISIS were not allies, but the latter did serve the objectives of the former, its growth aiding the counter-revolutionary offensive and offering a means to global legitimacy.

If revolution means simply the violent founding of a new order, then it is easy to see ISIS as revolutionaries, standing in an antinomian and universalist tradition stretching back to Cromwell. Such a move, however, ignores the contradiction in both form and content between ISIS and the revolutionary uprising that broke out in Syria in 2011. That uprising – not ISIS – was responsible for the fracture in the Syrian state into which the caliphate could impose itself. ISIS did not derive its support or its mobilising power either from the alternative institutions established by that uprising or from the popular coalition – including many conservative Sunni Islamists – that made it up. On the contrary, ISIS destroyed those institutions, and killed, imprisoned or exiled the revolutionaries who had created them. The transformation enforced by ISIS in the areas they controlled was brutal, totalising and partisan but preserved rather than overthrew the social relations prevalent under the Ba'ath and even the administrative infrastructure of the old regime. ISIS was true to the fusion of Ba'athist methods and Qutbist ideology – the latter itself strongly influenced by European traditions of reactionary modernity – from which the organisation hailed. In these ways, and its ambiguous opposition to the regime, ISIS served as a counter-revolutionary force even as its challenge to the existing regional and global order seemed to recall earlier revolutionary movements. What then is to be made of ISIS' primary foe in Northern Syria after 2015 – the Kurdish Democratic Union Party and its project of 'democratic confederalism'?

The Revolution in Rojava?

The political entity established in north-eastern Syria in 2013 – frequently referred to as 'Rojava' but officially known as the 'Autonomous Administration of North-Eastern Syria'– seems to offer a quite different version of social transformation, one far more amenable to visions of revolution from the Left. The experiment attracted considerable international interest and support, not just in the form of a military alliance with the Pentagon but solidarity from traditional opponents and critics of US imperialism. For one Western supporter, the Rojava cantons constituted 'a social revolution' analogous to the Spain of 1936 and equally threatened by obscurantist reaction: ISIS playing the role of Franco and the *Falange*.59 Whatever the merits of such an analogy,

the Rojava experiment and the evolution of its leading force, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), present a case study of the trajectory of revolutionary politics: from models of nation-state building revolution from above to more diffuse and horizontalist ideas of social transformation. What were the origins of this shifting programme of revolutionary change, and how did it relate to the actually existing revolutionary movement in Syria?

To answer this question requires an expansion of the lens from Syria to Kurdistan: the territory inhabited by most Kurds and divided between Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. The Kurdish national movements behind each of these nation-state boundaries developed their own parties, programmes and rivalries. The history of the Kurdish Democratic Party and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan in Iraq, for example, is quite different to that of their counterparts in Turkey. From the birth of the republic, Syrian Kurds developed their own political traditions and parties. The roots of the PYD, however, cannot be understood without reference to its sister party, which prosecuted a decades-long insurgency in Turkish Kurdistan, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its intellectual and political leader Abdullah Öcalan.

In its founding incarnation in 1978, the PKK represented a latecoming instance of a 'Marxist-Leninist' aspiring to national liberation and revolution from above. The founding document of the organisation declared the 'Kurdistan national liberation struggle...an inseparable segment of the world socialist revolution strengthened by the socialist countries, national liberation movement and working-class movements'.60 Under the leadership of the PKK, this struggle would, in the strategy laid out in its founding declaration, 'establish a Democratic People's Dictatorship in an Independent and Unified Kurdistan and eventually...create a classless society'.61 On the basis of this politics, typical of the anti-colonial revolutions then reaching their end-points, the PKK launched its insurgency against the Turkish state. The high point of this insurgency occurred in the 1980s and 1990s – offering Hafez al-Assad an opportunity for leverage against Anakara, seized with the granting of relative freedom to operate for the PKK in northern Syria as its base of operations.62

The adherence of the PKK to a late variant of anti-colonial revolution from above is unsurprising, given the similarity of the context in which the organisation was born. Suffering from the national and linguistic chauvinism of the Kemalist state, the Kurdish peasantry of south-eastern Anatolia also had to contend with an entrenched landowning class of *aghas* and sheikhs who 'maintained close relations with the state and regarded peasants and villagers as their subjects'.63 Relations of personal dependence battened upon a mass of tenants and sharecroppers poorer and more likely to be landless than their (Turkish-speaking) counterparts to the North and West: a majority of the peasantry in the provinces of Diyarbakir and Urfa had no land.64

The landowners who controlled these villages, usually Kurds themselves, nonetheless slotted into the Kemalist order as members of parliament, hoovering up the votes of their subordinates, and then investors in an increasingly mechanised agriculture that displaced former tenants and sharecroppers.65 Little wonder then that the national

liberation ideology of the PKK corresponded so closely to that of similar guerrilla movements in the post-colonial world, emblazoned with the iconography of workers' movements but directed primarily against personalist agrarian power. Although typically led by former students and attracting a socially diverse array of cadres, the mainstay of the PKK *maquis* came from the sharecropping agrarian population: a 'peasant movement' in the words of the Turkish chief of staff charged with destroying it.66

The PKK was permitted to operate in Syria under Hafez on the provision that its activities were directed against Turkey and did not touch upon the oppression of Kurds inside the country: an injunction largely observed by Abdullah Öcalan, who was based in Syria during the high period of the PKK insurgency. Where Kurds were denied linguistic and national recognition in Turkey, being categorised as 'mountain Turks', in Syria Arab nationalist regimes of first the United Arab Republic and then the Ba'ath undertook measures of direct discrimination against them. The fact that Kurds were not Arabs, and that the Kurdish national movement was the object of Israeli and US overtures, was used to stigmatise the population as fifth columnists.67 Part of this stigmatisation involved the deprivation of citizenship and the settlement of Arab colonists on Kurdish land in the fertile *jazirah* of north-eastern Syria: policies that endowed a legacy of mistrust and segregation evident in the conflict between the PYD and armed opposition forces after 2011. An 'extraordinary census' in 1962 defined 120,000 Kurds in the area as 'non-resident foreigners' unable to vote, own property, or work as civil servants. 68 In the early 1970s, non-Kurdish peasants displaced by the building of the Tabqa dam – much fought over by the contending sides after 2011 – were settled in new developments beside Kurdish villages.69 Syria's Kurdish population is, hence, spread across three noncontiguous 'cantons' in the North East–Cezire/Jazira, Afrin and

Kobane/'Ayn al-Arab–interspersed with non-Kurdish villages and settlements. Substantial Kurdish communities are also to be found in particular neighbourhoods of Aleppo and Damascus. The relations of peasants, landlords and the central state, notwithstanding the proclaimed 'Arab Socialism' of the Ba'ath, did not differ significantly from the Turkish side of the border: Kurds often working as agricultural labourers on the plains, cultivating staple food crops, while the more favourable riverine valleys were given over to the 'Arab belt' colonisation programmes.70 Nonetheless, the success of the PYD after 2011 did not derive from long roots in the agrarian struggles of this region, as it did in Turkey, but rather the space afforded to its predecessor organisation under Hafiz alAssad. A warming of Syro-Turkish relations in the late 1990s led to the expulsion of Ocalan from the country and his later arrest in Kenya. Regime policy towards the PKK turned harsher, subjecting the party to the kind of repression doled out to independent political initiatives in other parts of Syria.71 The PKK, although strengthened by the operational space given to it by the Assad regime, was never the dominant party in Syrian Kurdistan – rather, political fractions based around landowners and urban notables 'monopolised the movement by mediating be-

tween the Kurdish urban middle class and the regime'.72 The PKK did appeal to 'Kurdish students from smaller towns who contested the landed and urban elites' dominance', but these were never moulded into the insurgent force of the organisation in Turkey.73

The roots of the establishment of the Autonomous Administration of northern Syria lie instead in the ideological and organisational shift to which Ocalan won the PKK from his prison cell. Influenced not only by the outcome of his own organisation's struggle but by reflection on the entire cycle of twentieth-century revolution and national liberation, Ocalan moved to a new ideological framework. Rather than a revolution from above brought about by a state-building national liberation movement, the PKK would now aspire to liberation *from* the state. Influenced by Murray Bookchin's critique of the state and Benedict Anderson's history of nationalisms, Ocalan instead proposed a '"new socialism" based on a societal transformation coming from below'.74 Rather than a state committed to developing the productive forces – which Ocalan diagnosed as the central component of Stalinist and national liberation projects and hence as the handmaiden rather than gravedigger of capitalist social relations – this new dispensation would seek to undo the ecological damage done by such states and to reverse the hierarchical gender relations associated with them.75 Hence, the strategic aim of the PYD in Syria would be not the establishment of a Kurdish state as such but rather 'concentrate on basic rights' than the 'nation-state ideal'.76

This model revived the idea of a post-capitalist society based upon the federation of local democratic councils, explicit in the European revolutionary experiences of 1917–23.77

Questions of the personal sincerity or otherwise of Ocalan's horizontalist turn are beside the point: more consequential was the political capital expended to win the organisation to his new position. In doing so, Ocalan caused a split with other leaders who were committed to the national liberation position but, following the end of the Cold War, jumped from Soviet to US hegemony as the means to achieve it. Such figures argued that 'we need a national state, we want to have an independent Kurdistan, this is the time to do it and we want to realise this together with the USA'.78 Needless to say, the PKK's enemies in the Turkish state shared this scepticism about 'ecological paradise or whatever': so, however did some of the organisation's ground commanders fighting in northern Syria who held the opinion that '[t]hose who think that a society can exist without a state can keep on dreaming' in the face of 'the reality of the international system, which consists of states with borders'.79 A struggle had to be carried on within the PKK to win its cadres (perhaps only partially) to this new perspective. In doing so, the organisation responded to the global change in the characteristic of revolutionary movements in the late twentieth century – away from the national liberation revolutions against agrarian counter-revolution, predicated on state-led social transformation and towards the more diffuse, horizontalist objectives of 'second-wave rural movements'.80

This change in worldview was accompanied by organisational restructuring. Responding also to the change of Syrian policy in the early 2000s, Ocalan and his allies established the overall structure of the 'group of communities in Kurdistan': embracing the PKK in Turkey, the newly founded PYD in Syria, and their equivalent organisations, the Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK) in Iran and the Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party (PCDK) in Iraq'.81 These were nominally independent parties sharing the new world view promoted by Ocalan. The PYD remained illegal in Syria: the co-ordinating centre for all these bodies remained the PKK headquarters in Qandil, Iraq. Unconnected to the PYD, in 2004 an uprising began in Qamishlo in the province of Hassakeh, prefiguring that of 2011 and establishing the 'Ciwanan Serilhadana' or 'Youth Uprising' group that would organise many of the protests in the latter year.82

When the 2011 revolution erupted in Kurdish areas, the movement was neither led nor dominated by the PYD, nor did the form of the uprising differ significantly from that in other parts of Syria. Qamishlo, for example, saw the same kind of demonstrations as other provincial cities, albeit featuring Kurdish slogans and flags: including a very large demonstration of tens of thousands following the assassination of the activists Meshal Temmo in the autumn of 2011.83 By 2012, 'the security forces increasingly lost control' with demonstrations that 'reached their peak' in the summer of that year, with protestors tearing down or painting over the public symbols of the regime.84 Qamishlo and its environs were the one area from which the regime did not withdraw in favour of the PYD in 2012: but protests also occurred in other areas. As in non-Kurdish areas, 'Local Co-ordinating Committees' were established, enjoying an uneven relationship with both Arab activists – far from universally sympathetic to Kurdish national demands – and the established Kurdish parties, including the PYD.85

These divisions were reflected in the founding of two competing representative bodies in Syrian Kurdistan in 2011: the 'Kurdish National Council' associated with the '1957 parties', such as the Kurdish Democratic Party, and the 'People's Council of Western Kurdistan', dominated by the PYD and its support organisation, 'The Democratic Society Movement' or TEV-DEM.86 The KNC did not share the PYD's vision of social transformation, while for the latter, the KNC's closeness to Mustafa Barzani and hence to Turkey and the Syrian opposition Syrian National Council rendered the council suspect.87 Attempts at creating a unified Kurdish body foundered on this division, and when the regime withdrew from Kurdish areas in 2012 – a highly consequential move discussed later – the administration was effectively handed over to the PYD. Rejecting the 'interim administration' with the KNC, TEV-DEM implemented the 'democratic self-administration project' in December 2013, later revised under the 'Federal Democratic Rojava Social Contract' of 2016.88 'Democratic confederalism' and the 'autonomous administration' refer to the forms of governance established by these declarations.

The notional basis of democratic confederalism was the devolution of power to local council administrations. The administration was divided into three cantons: Cezire,

Afrin and Kobane. These cantons formed discontinuous salients from Afrin the West to Cezire in the East, initially separated by substantial swaths of territory controlled by ISIS, other Islamist or armed opposition groups or eventually Turkey. The entire project was dominated by the imperative – never fully achieved in the face of Turkish opposition – of uniting the three cantons. Each canton featured a legislative, executive and judicial council that, in theory, derived their powers from the district councils beneath them and the local communes beneath those.89 An overall council linked the three cantonal administration: at each level of governance, gender parity of administrative positions and representation of different religious and linguistic groups was, on paper, to be assured.90

In principle, this governance structure – of sovereignty proceeding upwards from the lowest to the highest levels, based on egalitarian representation between genders, religions, and national-linguistic groups – would be radically revolutionary anywhere in the world. In a region where most authority is undemocratic, highly centralised and based upon the local supremacy of particular religious or linguistic groups and the generalised supremacy of men, the experiment was remarkable. Its authors intended it to be so, seeing political and social transformation through the rejection of the nation-state as the solution to the regional crisis.91 Yet the implementation of this project was also contradictory – in its relationship to the regime and the 2011 uprising, as discussed later, and in the domination of the PYD/TEV-DEM over other political currents. One aspect that the democratic confederalist experiment held in common with ISIS and other Islamist formations such as Jabhat al-Nusra was the analogue of a revolutionary party: a committed but flexible organisation of cadres prepared to lead a struggle for power and make use of that power to enforce a social transformation. The transformation thus enforced, such as the mobilisation and inclusion of 'marginalized groups...including women' were welcomed even by opponents of the PYD's domineering hegemony.92

Actual elections to the cantonal councils did not take place until 2017, several years after the first founding of the autonomous administration. TEV-DEM officials maintained that they were struggling to 'revive democracy' under conditions of war and blockade – a reasonable assertion but one that could equally be extended to the local councils elsewhere in Syria with which the autonomous administration made no attempt to cooperate, seeing them as dominated by Islamists or Turkish allies.93 The separation between TEV-DEM, the political movement, and the administrative structures of the cantons was on paper clear but in practice highly murky.94 Accusations that the organisation promoted a cult of personality around Ocalan were hardly dispelled when pictures of Bashar al-Assad in Kurdish – and Arab – towns under their control were simply replaced with posters of the former.95 The PYD also had the advantage of armed military and security apparatuses, the Peoples' Protection Units (YPG) and the internal police, or 'Asayish'. The latter in particular were accused of arresting and, in some cases, killing opponents of the PYD: the latter in particular were accused of shooting six and arresting fifty protestors at a rally in Amude in 2013

in support of the rival 'Yekiti' party associated with the Kurdish National Council.96 The exclusion of political rivals is, of course, a common feature of revolutionary administrations, but in the PYD's case, this also extended to those activists who had opposed the Ba'athist regime in 2011.97 Although the autonomous administrations do seem to have achieved a degree of participation and legitimacy, in the words of one sympathetic observer, the PKK headquarters in Qandil retained 'the final say in decisive questions'.98

Where the PYD and TEV-DEM's attempt to transform political structures and gender relations was profound, their forays into economic policy were more cautious. The 'Rojava Social contract' preserved the right of private property and hence the holdings of landlords whom the PYD hoped to entice into investing in agricultural co-operatives.99 The local assemblies displayed 'no ambition... to expropriate holdings', retaining only a general 'ideological tendency' towards land socialisation – a substantial 80 per cent of agricultural land in the Jazirah having already been nationalised under the Ba'ath.100 Wealthy businessmen, such as Akram Kamal Hasu, were to be found at the highest levels of the local canton administration without any threat to their property or influence.101 There were some expropriations, however, of a Norwegian-owned private hospital, leading to an international lawsuit, and of the property of some (largely Christian) refugees who had fled the region, but these seem ad hoc rather than a coherent programme.102

The PYD/TEV-DEM undoubtedly attained local support through their provision of services, forthcoming even from their opponents. In the words of one non-Kurdish activist opposed to the PYD, 'all ideologies drop in front of a loaf of bread'.103 The autonomous administration built bakeries and sugar refineries, efficiently providing fuel, electricity, health care and water services to residents. Service provision even included the establishment of a new university, the 'Mesopotamian Social Sciences Academy': the name of the institution reflecting the PYD's aspiration to transcend the existing nation-states of the region.104 The autonomous administration did not attempt, however, to transcend the principle of payment for services, all of which were given on fee-taking basis. Like their Qutbist opponents in the Islamic state, the PYD remained trapped within the relations of capital and state they aspired to abolish. Just like ISIS, the autonomous administration – incurring declared expenditures of $7.7 million in 2015 – relied upon oil revenue and agricultural taxation to fund itself. The only substantial airport in the region, at Qamishli, remained in regime hands; as in ISIS much of the civil service's salaries continued to be paid by Damascus, and TEV-DEM and regime officials, reaching a *modus vivendi* over separate budget lines.105

A Contradictory Revolution?

Where the PYD and its autonomous administration profoundly transformed the political structures and gender relations – if not the relations of production – in their zones of control, this transformation was predicated not on a continuity with the uprising but a separation from it. The contrast with the more spontaneous but equally more socially conservative, local autonomous administrations thrown up by the revolution

elsewhere in the country is stark. Lacking this wider social base, the Rojava experiment was reliant upon the indulgence of outsiders: an ambiguous relationship with the central regime in Damascus, which saw the PYD as a lesser contender for power than the Arab and Islamist opposition, and considerable military support from the USA (to a lesser extent Russia) in the struggle against ISIS. This latter form of external dependence meant that when US policy changed under the Trump administration and most US forces withdrawn from Syria in the autumn of 2019, the PYD was at the mercy of its main enemy, Turkey. Turkey's subsequent invasion of the region prompted the PYD to call on Damascus to re-occupy towns such as Kobane and Manbij, putting an end to all the post-uprising experiments in new forms of governance.

The PYD decision to call on regime forces in 2019 seemed to confirm the criticism of their harshest opponents in the revolutionary camp that 'the PYD is the regime's ally'.106 The leader of the PYD, Saleh Muslim, rejected such accusations, claiming in 2011, and after that, the organisation sought the fall of the Assad regime and replacement by a negotiated settlement incorporating the forms of autonomous administration practised in Rojava.107 The PYD maintained, however, that it was opposed to the opposition, instead, occupying a 'third line...which does not support either the regime or the opposition' based upon the aspiration for 'the people's self-administration' through new 'cultural, social, economic and political institutions'.108 The PYD were certainly able to create such institutions following the withdrawal of the regime from Kurdish areas in 2012. But did the reliance of their project upon that withdrawal imply closeness to rather than equidistance from Assad's old regime?

The long-standing relationship between the PKK and Damascus under Assad *pere* has already been noted. In 2011, following the eruption of protest in towns such as Qamishlo, the regime proposed a new law (decree 107) allowing for greater decentralisation of power to regions.109 At the same time, Kurds stripped of their nationality in 1962 had their citizenship restored. As in other Syrian provinces, the regime was losing ground to both the military advances of the FSA and continued civilian protests in 2011–12. As part of its policy to protect its centres of core support, the regime withdrew from nine Kurdish towns and districts in the summer of 2012. PYD officials maintained that regime forces withdrew because of fighting with the YPG, but if so these clashes left little in the way of tangible evidence.110

Suspicions of a tacit understanding between the PYD and the Assad regime amongst opposition forces were strengthened by this apparently seamless takeover, and the simultaneous ceasefire announced by PJAK, the PYD's sister organisation in Iran.111 Rojava was notably spared the barrel bombing and heavy bombardment to which primarily Arab opposition areas were subject. Even at the beginning of the uprising in 2011, one Kurdish activist noted that 'we...were protesting while displaying revolutionary flags and chanting anti-Assad slogans right in front of the regime's security services, who totally ignored us' and '[n]ot a single bullet was fired against us'.112 This tactic of selective repression, reinforcing linguistic or religious divides amongst the opposition, was widely practised by the regime elsewhere. Such tactics did not nec-

essarily imply a long-term *modus vivendi* between Damascus and the PYD/TEV-DEM autonomous cantons: even under the terms of the decentralisation law, governors remained appointed by the central regime. The regime view, as expressed by one official, was that '[t]he Kurds go off track once in a while, before sooner or later requiring our support, at which point they are often ready to give Damascus what we have been waiting for'.113

If the PYD's relationship with the regime was ambiguous, that with the opposition tended toward the hostile. The multifarious nature of the revolutionary uprising and the opposition groups – Kurdish and Arab, civilian and armed, Islamist and non-Islamist – means that a single form of relationship between these and the much more ideologically cohesive PYD can be assumed. Even armed factions such as the 'Raqqa Revolutionaries' Front' and 'Euphrates Volcano', having fought against ISIS in their areas, briefly joined the YPG in the alliance of 'Syrian Democratic Forces'. The PYD also proved adept at managing relationships with some Arab tribal forces in the Deir Ezzor and Raqqa regions.114 Nonetheless, the PYD were certainly wrong-footed by the initial uprising and then quickly clashed with its armed successor. In 2011, the protest movement directed not against Turkey but Damascus had little affection for the PKK or understanding of its strategic objectives: in the words of one founding member of the organisation, '[w]e didn't know how to handle all that youthful energy...They had no interest in Turkey'.115 The militarily trained cadres dispatched from Qandil found themselves outflanked: 'the big problem they faced was to manage the street', which sought Kurdish rights in Syria rather than confrontation with Ankara.116 The response to this dilemma was to 'set up a self-administration and promote that as the foundation of future recognition of Kurdish rights'.117

The resultant split between the Kurdish National Council and the PYD-led organisation has already been noted. A further source of conflict was the KNC's association with the mainstream Syrian opposition, increasingly reliant on Turkey and unwilling to recognise any form of Kurdish self-determination. The 'National Charter' proposed by the SNC in July 2012 removed reference to a Kurdish nation from its original draft, prompting the withdrawal of the KNC from talks with the former organisation.118 The successor body of the Council, the Syrian National Coalition offered no improvement – while considering the PYD an ally of the regime – continuing in its 2016 'transition plan' to begin from the principle of Syria as a unitary republic based on 'the Arab culture and Islam'.119

Diplomatic discord was matched by military confrontation. From the summer of 2012 onwards, FSA units and increasingly the Qutbist forces of JAN came into conflict with the PYD, whom they regarded as allies of Damascus – including laying siege to Afrin and Kobane. These conflicts engulfed *Jabhat al-Akrad*, the 'Kurdish Front', which both participated in the FSA's campaign against the regime and enjoyed links with the PYD.120 A truce was reached in Afrin, however, and the rise of ISIS in 2014 changed the situation: an alliance of the YPG with FSA units managed to defeat the Caliphate, turning the tide at the battle of Kobane. At the high point of co-operation, the YPG

command in October 2014 affirmed 'building a free and democratic Syria' as 'the basis of the agreement we signed with factions of the FSA' and promoted this co-ordination as the basis for 'the success of the revolution'.121

The defeat of ISIS was to bring not further co-operation but rather an internationalised conflict between the remnants of FSA brigades and Islamist forces backed by Turkey against the YPG aligned with the United States (and to a lesser extent Russia). The YPG aided the regime's conquest of Aleppo in 2016 – apparently under the belief, soon disabused, that Damascus would permit them a continued presence in the Kurdish neighbourhoods of the city.122 The YPG moved into the predominantly Arab areas evacuated by ISIS. At first, a cause for celebration amongst the local population, the system of democratic confederalism was here imposed by co-operation with hitherto excluded sheikhs – in Manbij, for example, the PYD replaced the former Revolutionary Council that had governed the town before ISIS with its placemen, dominated a local clan accused of acting as '*shabiha*' for the regime.123 By 2019, the Turkish incursion into Afrin was spearheaded by former FSA and Islamist units, driving people from their homes and carrying out a series of anti-Kurdish atrocities.124

Behind this dynamic of confrontation lay the internationalisation of the contest between the PYD, the remnants of the armed opposition, and the regime. The strong showing of the YPG against ISIS, and its apparent

Conclusion 241 independence from Damascus, attracted the support of Washington. Where aid from the United States to the FSA and armed opposition had been inconstant and limited, that given to the Syrian Democratic Forces – under the convenient fiction that this body was not dominated by the YPG – was far more substantial. The SDF, unlike any other actor in the Syrian arena, was able to call upon US air support – which proved decisive in the struggle with ISIS. US special forces also operated alongside the SDF, co-ordinating tactics and hunting down the ISIS leadership. US arms were disbursed from bases in Rumeilan and Kobane.125 One US official summed up the relationship with the PYD thus: 'we come to them when we need them and we know they will be there'.126 The YPG were also able to rely at times upon Russian air support, for example, in the retaking of Tal Rifaat.127

This reliance on external patronage proved a double-edged sword for the democratic confederalist experiment. Once given, it could equally be taken away. By 2016, Ankara had switched its strategic objective from the downfall of Assad to the destruction of any autonomous Kurdish entity on the southern border: having already proved obstructive in the fight against ISIS in Kobane. Central to this objective was agreement with Russia effectively to partition Syria. Turkey abandoned its erstwhile allies, the armed opposition in Aleppo, to their fate in 2016, provided Russia would extend the same courtesy in regard to Rojava.128 Once US troops were withdrawn from Syria in summer 2019, the way was clear for the Turkish invasion of northern Syria east of the Euphrates.

Conclusion

ISIS, on the one hand, and the autonomous administration of Northern Syria, on the other, offer visions of social transformation as radical as they are different from one another. In this sense, they appear to fit within the tradition of socially transformative revolution otherwise absent from the uprisings of 2011. Yet closer inspection reveals the split between revolution and counter-revolution, and revolution from above and below, still at work. ISIS was a project of radical transformation, using state power yet rejecting the legitimacy of all extant states. Yet the caliphate functioned primarily as a counter-revolution against the revolutionaries of 2011 and the alternative structures they had established, objectively rendering service to the 'infidel regime' it otherwise despised. The PYD in Northern Syria, reflecting the rise of horizontalist rather than Islamist modes of revolution, sought quite a different transformation: a complete restructuring of political life supposedly based on the devolved sovereignty of local councils, and guaranteeing gender, linguistic and religious equality. Yet the PYD's vision was severed from, and came to conflict with, the actually existing revolution from below that had occurred in Syria and the institutions it through up – a far from onesided rejection, given the Arab chauvinism of much of the opposition but one that left the experiment fatally exposed once its foreign backers withdrew.

8. Conclusion; Where Is Counter-Revolution Going?

OUT OUT of TIME is spring's shattered hope,
In the deluge in our plains there are no rains but stones
Etel Adnan, 'The Arab Apocalypse'
We are doomed to hope, and come what may, today cannot be the end of history
Sa'adallah Wannous, 'Sentenced to Hope'

The first lesson of this book is that counter-revolutions matter. Revolutions do not merely fail, as the Arab revolutions of 2011 have so often been described as doing: counter-revolutions also succeed. Their success requires an explanation just as much as that of revolution. Counter-revolutionaries, like revolutionaries, are political subjects embedded in pre-existing structures of social relations who must act through or against local and global apparatuses of political power. Neither their defeat nor their victory is fore-ordained, although the eventual emergence of either illuminates both the strategies of counterrevolutionaries and the social bases on which they can depend.

The statement that counter-revolutions matter may seem a banal one. Yet most of the theoretical literature on revolutions, as well as the analytical and empirical literature on the fate of the Arab revolutions of 2011, has been written as if it is not. The most substantive works of the former treat counter-revolution as empirically important – the foil against which the emancipatory ambitions of a revolution are hardened into durable and despotic states, or the reason that such states fail to emerge at all – but theoretically negligible. The sparse treatment of counterrevolution reflects an understanding of revolution as defined by its consequences: as the rapid but enduring transformation of social and political structures brought about by mass, class-based revolts from below. Counter-revolution does have a place in this way of understanding revolution, as the 'Thermidor' that reverses the transformation of social relations even when the political and symbolic apparatus of the revolution remains intact. The problem comes when counter-revolution succeeds in preventing such transformation at all, or overthrowing it after a very brief interlude. Such instances become impossible to understand if revolution is defined solely by its enduring outcomes.

The Arab counter-revolutions have been obscured by this theoretical and analytical blind spot. Since the revolutionaries did not, for the most part, end up in power, nor did long-lasting social transformation issue from the uprisings that they led, the *intifadaat* of 2011 have been downgraded to the status of scattered protest movements, local rebellions, foreign conspiracies or mere *ahdath,* 'events:' the 'revolution that wasn't'.1

Once one understands revolutions as processes rather than outcomes, and counter-revolutionaries as agents in those processes, this view becomes unsustainable.

The Arab revolutions, although they did not (for the most part) succeed in producing the social or political transformation desired by their participants, met the criteria of being mass, class-based revolts from below that established situations of divided sovereignty in the states in which they occurred. In fact, these were the largest and broadest protest movements in the history of each of the states in which they broke out, and some of the largest in the world. Where the data is available, participation rates in the uprisings far outstrip those of paradigmatic revolutions such as France in 1789 or Russia in 1917. At least four states – Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, and Yemen – experienced nationwide strike waves, the largest in their history, and some of the largest in global labour history. In at least three states – Syria, Libya and Yemen – sovereign authority fractured into competing institutions, while elsewhere the ruling social order was challenged by demands for 'cleansing' or a 'parallel revolution' in both public and private organisations. The fact that these very deep revolutionary situations, brought about mass revolts that entered into violent and divisive confrontation with the state, did not issue in revolutionary transformations is an outcome to be explained, not assumed. One can only see these as 'revolutions that weren't' by ignoring the counter-revolutions that were.

The second lesson of this counter-revolutionary success is that counter-revolutions are popular. They may not command the support of a majority of the population (nor, frequently, do revolutions), but counter-revolutions extend beyond the strategic decisions of a strategic core of the old regime to find a mass base. Counter-revolutionaries must solve, in different ways, the dilemma of reconstituting – or rather re-composing – the elements of an old order that acquiescence has ceased to sustain. This does not mean, as in the reading that 'counterrevolution is revolution'2 or the claim that no class distinction is visible between the partisans of revolution and counter-revolution,3 that revolution and counter-revolution are simply forms of the same elite

Conclusion: Where Is Counter Revolution Going? 245 mobilisation. Counter-revolutions unite, in Arno Mayer's terms, the 'masses' and the '[ruling] classes', where revolutions pitch the former against the latter.4 If the Arab counter-revolutions appear quite different to the most stereotypical form of European counter-revolution – in which traditional monarchical authority, agrarian patriarchal hierarchy and sacral duty were united against the revolutionary challenge – this is because they occurred in quite different societies. The predatory landholding classes who, in and out of uniform, vestment or bureaucratic office, provided the spine of such previous counter-revolutionary movements were long-dispossessed. In the Arab republics, this dispossession had occurred through the revolutions from above of the 1960s and 1970s no less genuinely transformative for their undemocratic character. Proclaiming the advent of unity and Arab socialism, what these revolutions from above actually brought about were independent capitalist states (if weak and largely subordinate ones in the global hierarchy) in which the 'agrarian question of capital' had been

solved.5 The neoliberal policies of the infitah era continued rather than overturned this transformation.

To turn back the revolutionary tide, inspired by opposition to infitah type economic policies, that broke in 2011, the counter-revolutionaries reached back to the inheritance of these revolutions from above. The solutions differed – counter-revolutionaries in Egypt and Tunisia were able to rely on the heritage of 'secular' national development and the class conservatism of mainstream Islamist political parties to win some of the revolutionary movement to their side. In Syria, a cross-sectarian elite – having lost the rural social base gained in the revolution from above of the 1970s – relied upon sectarianisation and repression to weld a coalition of religious minorities and much of the Sunni bourgeoisie. In Bahrain, the outlier case of a monarchy amongst the Arab counterrevolutions, a more direct sectarianism was employed to exclude the majority population and support a policy of counter-revolutionary repression. Even in those states that fractured and collapsed, Libya and Yemen, the long-term consequences of the previous revolutions from above, in the form of Field Marshal Haftar's counter-revolutionary aspirations or the rise of the Houthis to power, continued to play a role in the post-2011 conflicts.

The third lesson is that counter-revolutions are international. This claim is by no means controversial or new: from Burke's declamations against the 'regicide peace' with France onwards, if not before, counterrevolution has been understood as a war conducted by the states of an existing order against one struggling to be born. In the historical conjuncture in which the Arab revolutions broke out, however, international counter-revolution against them was not widely expected. Either these revolutions represented the late coming of the democratising, liberal revolutions of 1989 – in which case they could expect to be welcomed into an international system dominated by such values – or they were a continuation (like the 1989 revolutions) of a project of regime change directed against challengers to that system, in which case they were not revolutions to begin with. Both these opposing arguments assumed a congruence between a liberal system under US hegemony and the events of 2011 – considered as democratising revolutions, uprisings or conspiracies – in the Arab republics. The Arab counter-revolutions in practice refuted this assumption.

Although the NATO bombing campaign against the Gaddafi regime in 2011 was certainly animated by a version of the regime doctrine, it was neither led by the United States nor the source of the uprising against the Jamahiriya. The United States and its allies did provide some aid to 'vetted' Syrian opposition fighters, but this intervention paled by comparison even with the US campaign in the same country against ISIS and in alliance with the Kurdish PYD – was not in favour of regime change. The overwhelming majority of international interventions in the region after 2011, whether the active military campaigns in Syria, Bahrain, Libya and Yemen or subtler forms of intervention in Egypt and Tunisia, served counter-revolutionary objectives. This was so whether the states involved in them were allies of the West or opponents. Rather, the Middle East was riven by competitive counter-revolutionary alliances: one

headquartered in Abu Dhabi and Riyadh, one in Tehran and Moscow, and one – favouring political over social revolution – in Ankara and Doha. Both the age of anti-colonial revolutions of the early and mid-twentieth century and that of the liberal democratising revolutions that followed it had passed. No international camp could be relied upon as a source of aid rather than counter-revolution, and identifying with one alliance implied denigrating the revolutionary uprisings against another.

Regional Consequences of the Counter-Revolutions

The contest between these counter-revolutionary camps has devastated the region. In Syria, the decade long-agony of civil war claimed nearly half a million lives and displaced half the population. Many of the latter would drown in the Mediterranean Sea in their desperation to reach an at best fatally indifferent European Union. A further 98,000 were 'disappeared' to an unknown, but probably deadly, fate.6 The example of the Syrians became an admonition to those, in the Middle East and beyond, who might follow the example of their uprising. Yemen's civil war had produced 100,000 dead by the end of the decade, not to mention those starved to death by the Saudi-Emirati blockade or who perished from disease in a besieged and collapsing health system.7 Death tolls for the Libyan civil wars are harder to estimate but range in the tens of thousands, while close to 1,000 people were killed in one day in Egypt's Raba'a al-Adawiya massacre in 2013.8 The exact numbers are unlikely ever to be established with precision, but once the consequences of death in prison, torture, disease and blockade are included, it seems implausible that the Arab counter-revolutions have claimed less than one million lives. A revolutionary wave of historically remarkable breadth and depth was met with a counter-revolution of concomitant violence and extent.

But the counter-revolutions did not merely restore the old order that reigned until 2010. An index of the consequences of the revolutionary wave of 2011 is actual emergence of new states, or state-like entities, and the fracturing of old ones: two, and at times three, competing authorities in Libya; three in Yemen if one includes the secession of the Southern Transitional Council, the Houthi statelet in the North, and the rump central administration that is supposed to rule over both them; and two entirely new state projects in Northern Syria, that of ISIS and the PYD's democratic confederalism. This is without including the effective Turkish protectorate around Idlib in Northern Syria, dominated by the ideological and organisational descendants of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the descendant of Jabhat al-Nusra. These profound changes in the regional order would not have occurred without the uprisings of 2011 or the counter-revolutions against them.

The counter-revolutionary regimes that preside (with the exception of Tunisia) over the states that experienced uprisings in 2011 represent not merely the restoration of authoritarian rule but its re-composition. Three forms present themselves. First, the outright counter-revolutionary victories of Egypt, Bahrain and Syria have produced more violent and more exclusionary versions of the *anciens regimes*, deprived of the façade of democratising reforms that characterised the 'authoritarian upgrading' of the early 2000s. These counter-revolutionary regimes preserved some of the techniques of

this period, such as managed electoral events: Bahrain held two sets of parliamentary elections between 2011 and the time of writing, in 2014 and 2018; Syria three, alongside Bashar al-Assad's presidential re-elections in 2014 and 2021; Abdel Fattah alSisi likewise staged two presidential elections confirming him in power in 2014 and 2018. These are not fascist regimes in which the idea of democratic legitimacy is rejected: only its actual practice. No one expected the Baʿath 'National Unity' list not to win a majority of the

Syrian parliamentary seats in 2020 in an election in which that organisation nominated and vetted the majority of the candidates.9 Likewise, the only other candidate to stand in the Egyptian 2018 presidential election was himself a supporter of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.10 In this regard, the counter-revolutionary regimes adopted some of the methods pre-2011 status quo.

The content of such measures differed from before 2011, however. Elections then served, as in Egypt, either to open the political space to contenders – the Muslim Brotherhood – whose proximity to power would bring forth more aid with fewer conditions from Washington or to divert opposition into fruitless contests. Parliamentary elections under the counter-revolutionary regimes function as ways of rewarding and solidifying the counter-revolutionary coalition in systems from which any opposition has been excluded. In Syria, the national parliament has formed a means to consolidate a stratum of businessmen close to the regime, including figures such as Fares al-Shehabi, scion of an Aleppo manufacturing family, member of parliament and wartime president of the Federation of Syrian Chambers of Industry.11 The relationship of the counter-revolutionary regimes with capital is less straightforward than, for example, that of the 'cabinets of businessmen' prevalent in Egypt in the 2000s. These regimes have succeeded in repressing strikes and crushing uprisings of the poor – but in doing so have reconstituted their relationship with capital around loyal fractions that prepared to pay for and support the counter-revolutions.12

This relationship marks a broader restructuring that holds commonalities with the 'neo-illiberalism' identified by Reijer Hendrikse in Europe and the United States.13 Rather than the pre-2011 façade of progress towards universal citizenship, combined with deepening privatisation and free-market reforms, the counter-revolutionary regimes offered a new model of explicitly contractual, conditional social citizenship. Such models, as Steven Heydemann argues, 'link the preservation of social peace and contributions to the economic productivity of the nation to national security', placing mobilisation for economic and social demands in the category of 'treason and terrorism'.14 A feature of these counterrevolutionary regimes was thus the revocation of nationality. This was based in Egypt on 2017 amendments allowing the state to revoke the citizenship of Egyptians 'belonging to a group, association, front, organisation, gang or entity of any kind inside or outside the country, that aims to harm the public order of the state or undermine its social, economic or political order'.15 The practice was already implemented in Bahrain, while in Syria new laws on property registration and the 'settlement' of former opposition fighters established a two-tier of citizenship

between the 'loyal' and 'disloyal': the latter 'effectively de-nationalized through legal measures that erased their ability to exist as legal beings' in the country.16

The counter-revolutionary regimes, thus, repress far more people more violently than their pre-2011 counterparts. This repression is justified by an ideology of anti-Islamism, assimilating all forms of opposition to the regimes to the armed Qutbist variant of the latter. This form of rhetoric, of course, has characterised the Syrian regime's response to the uprising from its very beginning, becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy as the strategy of sectarianisation bore fruit. In Egypt, the Sisi regime characterised the Muslim Brotherhood as 'terrorists' and took advantage of a Qutbist insurgency in the Sinai – proclaiming allegiance to ISIS – to enforce further crackdowns. Field Marshal Haftar in Libya, fighting against Muslim Brotherhood affiliates but including armed Salafists amongst his troops, nonetheless also made enthusiastic use of this trope.17 In Bahrain, where the sectarian calculus was reversed, accusations against the opposition of affiliation with Lebanon's Hizballah took the place of ISIS and al-Qaeda.18

Having hardened the exclusionary aspects of the restored regimes and rendering any opposition an arm of disloyal conspiracy, weight of the coercive apparatus within the regimes has correspondingly increased. Nonetheless, these regimes did not form united or coherent projects once the initial turning back of the revolutionary tide had been achieved. Greater repression means more opportunity for the proliferation of security agencies and, therefore, competition between them – in the case of Syria, the militiaization of the state as a whole, including the incorporation of some former opposition units.19 Connected to such competition or not, the former chief of Egyptian staff, Major General Sami Anan, made an abortive attempt to contest the presidency in 2018.20 Apparent splits within the Egyptian ruling conclave emerged with the release of online videos in September 2019 by a former building contractor, Mohamed Ali, alleging corruption in the regime: the resulting protests, though small and swiftly repressed, were the first major instance of opposition since the coup of 2013. A similar division may have emerged in Syria in the spring of 2020, where Rami Makhlouf – pillar of the inner circle of the regime and chief funder of the counter-revolutionary effort through the 'Bustan' charity – also began posting videos criticising a crackdown on his companies and employees.21

Such cracks in the counter-revolutionary elite aside, the regimes in Egypt, Bahrain and Syria nonetheless represented victorious counterrevolutions. In Tunisia, by contrast, an exception of sorts held: a continuation of the political revolution hemmed in by the failure to address the social discontent that had provoked the original uprising. Protests continued, even accelerated, in the latter half of the 2010s in Tunisia as the series of alliances embedded in Nidaa Tounes fell apart. The presidential elections of 2019 brought to power a figure more representative of the aspirations of 2011: Qais Said, a culturally conservative legal academic known for his personal integrity and attracting a landslide of support from the neglected revolutionary youth in the second round of the presidential poll.22

In a third and final set of outcomes of the counter-revolutions, Yemen and Libya remained locked in civil war a decade after the beginning of the uprisings. No single force proved able to establish a new regime, counter-revolutionary or otherwise, although aspirants to this role – such as Field Marshal Haftar – were not absent. Even the offensive of the latter had begun to stall by the spring of 2020, stymied by increased Turkish aid to his enemies and leading to plans for direct Egyptian intervention to shore up the Field Marshal.23 This confrontation demonstrated – inconceivable a decade earlier when the idea of Turkish and Egyptian forces confronting each other on the battlefield belonged to the realm of fantasy rather than strategy – testified to a further effect of the Arab counterrevolutions: the geopolitical restructuring of the region.

This restructuring again took a threefold aspect. First, and most major, was the decline and retreat of US power in the region. The USdominated status quo of 2010, albeit shaky, by 'a multipolar system lacking the shared norms, diplomatic channels or balancing mechanisms that previously constrained inter-regional conflict and the use of force'.24 In 2010, the Obama administration may have been chastened by the failure of the regime change efforts of its predecessor in Iraq, but nonetheless remained the essential interlocutor for all of the states in the Middle East, friend or foe. The Egyptian, Saudi and allied regimes clustered around the United States and its support for Israel, while paying at least rhetorical heed to the demands of the Palestinians dispossessed by the latter: the 'axis of resistance' in Iran, Syria and Hizballah defined itself by opposition to the United States and Israel, at least until these could be persuaded to make meaningful concessions. Turkey and Qatar attempted to pursue diplomatic lines independent of the two.

What changed in the 2010s was not necessarily the character of relations with the United States but their universal relevance. Where once any negotiations in the region would have involved Washington, and been carried on under the auspices of 'liberal norms and practices', the Arab revolutions accelerated the withdrawal of the United States from such predominance.25 The 'Astana Process' that established 'de-escalation zones' in Syria was conducted between Russia, Iran and

Turkey – unsurprisingly, since these were the main external backers of the forces fighting on the ground – with the United States confined to minimal advocacy for the SDF. In Yemen, the United States acted essentially to support and supply the war policy pursued by Riyadh and Abu Dhabi – the success of American peace campaigners in hampering arms supplies to the GCC not withstanding.26 The withdrawal of most US troops from Northern Syria, where they had been allied to the SDF, set the seal on this transition. Russia, not the United States, was the indispensable interlocutor in Syria.

The second aspect of the restructuring of the region's geopolitics was the concomitant 'rise of multiple regional powers with rival goals' in a region 'no longer either a unipolar system organised around US domination or a bipolar system defined by Saudi-Iranian rivalry'.27 Shifting alliances, established through a trio of counter-revolutionary axes, employed both direct military force and non-state proxies without

regard to any of the norms of sovereignty or indeed the laws of armed conflict: the UAE and Saudi Arabia having been let loose by the apparent and initial identification of the Obama administration with 'democracy seeking protestors in Cairo, Tunis and elsewhere'.28 When the United States returned to the region, it was on the terms set by Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, although these – especially withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal and the prospect of confrontation with Tehran – were also reflected in the Trump administration's foreign policy programme. Iran, and the counterrevolutionary alliance it mustered with Russia in the Syrian arena, also sought to remake the region in the wake of declining US power – an aspiration shared by the weakest of the three post-2011 axes that linked Turkey and Qatar.29

This re-composition and intensification of regional competition brought forth a third change, still fluid at the time of writing: an apparent demotion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as the axis around which other regional alignments revolved. The ability of Israel to quell Palestinian resistance behind the 'security barrier' – as Israel termed the wall it erected to envelop Jewish settlements in the West Bank and prevent Palestinian access beyond the 1967 armistice line – was already evident by 2010. A decade later, however, Tel Aviv could count not only on the support of the United States and the equanimity of the European Union towards its enterprise of settlement and eventual annexation of Palestinian territory but also that of the new centres of Arab counter-revolution in the Gulf. The threat of democratic uprising, embodied in the Saudi and Emirati imagination by the Muslim Brotherhood and Qatar, and of Iran, proved far more compelling than any rhetorical commitment to the Palestinian cause. This shift was embodied in the recognition of Israel by the UAE, the so-called Abraham agreement brokered by Washington in August of 2020, which was expected to lead to similar moves by Riyadh.30

If the counter-revolutionaries against 2011 could count themselves victors by the end of the decade, this victory nonetheless proved far from total. Beginning in Sudan and Algeria, two states not untouched by the movements of 2011, the last year of the decade witnessed a new upsurge of *thawraat*: not only Sudan and Algeria but also Lebanon and Iraq. Notably, these were all societies that had witnessed recent civil wars and/ or Islamist insurgencies as destructive as those wrought by the Arab counter-revolutions – yet they proved fertile ground for the return of the demands 'the people demand the fall of the regime' and 'bread, freedom, social justice'.31 Moreover, these new revolts – at least until the intervention of the COVID-19 pandemic – sought not just 'to topple their unelected dictators as we saw in 2011' but a 'fundamental change of the entire political and economic system'.32 In states such as Lebanon and Iraq, the demand for such change hit at the sectarian monopolies of power and wealth propped up by geopolitical alliances with the Gulf and the United States and the 'axis of resistance' alike.33 The battle between revolution and counter-revolution in the region was not yet settled.

Global Implications of the Arab Counter-Revolutions

Arwa Salih, in her memoir of the Egyptian student movement of the 1970s, writes from a vantage point two decades later:

The laws that governed the eruption of revolutions through the beginning of the twentieth century have changed, as has the composition of the various social classes and their relative power. International capitalism seems to have learnt the lessons of those early revolutions better than everyone else and, with its vast resources, has become practically the sole architect of this dark era.34

The idea that the late 1980s represented a 'dark era' would have seemed foreign to those who celebrated the apparent triumph of liberal democratising revolutions over Cold War authoritarianisms in the Eastern and Western bloc alike. Yet Salih was no apologist for the Stalinist regimes falling as she wrote these words. Like others on the Arab left, however, she based her critique of those regimes – and the politics of her own youth – on the bedrock of revolutionary defeat rather than liberal victory. The 'pious certitude' of her comrades derived from the 'continuing existence of the Soviet regime...that had once been inspired by a wave of worker revolutions in the capitalist West'. When this 'wave retreated, the glow of the first victorious socialist revolution disintegrated behind the iron curtain and bourgeois national-liberation movements of the third worldwhose successes were built on the ruins of the communist movements– came to occupy the centre stage of world events'.35

The metaphor of the revolutionary wave, well-worn though it may be, is a useful one. Revolutions also surge forth to a high tide, founder and retreat. They leave nothing unchanged or unturned, but their action is powerful and unpredictable rather than benign. Salih was writing in the midst of a revolutionary wave that was about to reach its peak: but unlike the waves of the natural world, as Salih writes, the 'laws that govern' the emergence of revolutions change with each iteration of the phenomenon. What do the outcomes of the Arab revolutions, and of the counterrevolutions that crushed them, tell us about the revolutions of the early twenty-first century?

First, one much distinguish the eruptions of 2011 from their predecessors. If revolutions prove difficult to define, revolutionary waves are doubly so. Colin Beck provides a broad understanding of revolutionary waves as 'two or more revolutionary situations in two or more societies within a decade of each other'.36 On this permissive definition, Beck identifies five revolutionary waves in twentieth-century Europe (excluding, therefore, the anti-colonial revolutions against European empires.) These consist of the 'democratic revolutions' of 1905–10; the 'First World War' revolutions including the Irish Easter rising and the Russian Revolution; 'fascism'; 'World War Two'; and '1989 and the collapse of Communism'.37 Michael Beissinger's database of revolutionary situations offers a more inductive, and global, means of identifying revolutionary waves by frequency of revolutionary episodes – revolutionary situations as the term has been used in this book:

Four peaks, prior to the Arab revolutions – which rank with the periods surrounding the establishment and fall of the Soviet Union in terms of new revolutionary episodes per year – are visible in this table. The first peak is the revolutionary wave that

preceded and then was accelerated by the Russian Revolution in 1915–1919, continuing into the early 1920s; the second, smaller and more chronologically isolated, at the end of the Second World War; the third, counter-intuitively at its height in the early 1960s (corresponding to the wave of anti-colonial revolutions) and then slightly decreasing in the latter part of the decade; and the fourth beginning its upward ascent after 1975 to peak in the collapse of the Soviet bloc in the early 1990s. Most notable of all is the general upward trend in revolutionary episodes.

A table of *counter-revolutions* would not necessarily correspond exactly to the inverse of Beissinger's chart, but counter-revolutions nevertheless lurk in the dips indexed by the graph. Counter-revolutions, as Kurt Weyland notes, form the rocks upon which revolutionary waves founder: learning to offer greater, more co-ordinated resistance as the upsurge spreads over time and space.39 Counter-revolutions are not historically identical, however. One of the consequences of a revolutionary wave is to determine the kind of opponents its successors will face.

[image not archived]

Figure 1 The onset of revolutionary episodes 1900 2014, adapted from Beissinger (2020)38

As Charles Kurzman has demonstrated, the revolutionary wave of 1915-1924 had its roots in the largely forgotten revolutions of 1905-10 in Mexico, Russia, the Ottoman, Portuguese and Chinese Empires - Beck's 'democratic revolutions' . These revolutions - primarily led by intellectuals following a programme of 'positivist liberalism' and supported by landlords, capitalists, workers and peasants - turned to authoritarian and military counter-revolution as the former sought to protect their interests against an upsurge of class struggle by the latter.40

The reaction of the existing Great Powers to these revolutions was characterised by economic and political but not ideological, competition.41 The Russian (October) Revolution of 1917, seeking to expropriate landlords and capitalists and found a new form of state based on the Soviet workers' council, represented a lesson learned from these preceding revolutions. The subsequent revolutionary wave succeeded in dispossessing only the Russian landlords and capitalists - its retreat leaving Soviet regimes standing only in Moscow and, curiously, Outer Mongolia. Elsewhere, counter-revolution - uniting in various degrees the remaining labour-repressive landlord classes, capitalists *and*, as in the case of Germany, reformist Social Democrats – triumphed.

The anti-colonial revolutions that gathered strength in the 1950s and 1960s were far more successful. Either through their own policies, or through the prophylactic example they gave to regimes that wished to avoid being overthrown, these revolutions achieved a truly global, truly profound social transformation: the end of the labour-dependent, personally repressive landlord.42 Counter-revolutionary attempts to forestall or reverse this outcome were defeated, including those by European settler colonists and their imperial backers. As Elleni Centime Zeleke writes, 'anti-colonial movements must...mobilise the popular masses against the colonial state through a nationalist ideology and political programme' that, appealing to peasants 'is intertwined

with the fundamental economic and cultural problem of what to do with backward farmers and peasants'.43 Post-colonial states tended, therefore, to pursue 'passive revolution' or revolution from above as it has been termed in this book, to bring about not the 'socialism' they originally so often proclaimed but 'an economy based on capitalist social relations'.44 The combined colonial-metropolitan revolution in the Portuguese Empire in 1975 proved an inflection point. It is from this period, the late 1970s, that social transformation pursued by a newly founded state in the teeth of domestic and international counter-revolutionary opposition becomes replaced by 'the urban civic repertoire' of political regime change as the dominant form of revolution.45

This transition reached its apex in the spikes registered above between 1984 and 1994: the era of liberal, democratising or negotiated revolutions. These revolutions, as noted previously, occurred in a historically unusual habitable zone – a time in which the most democratic of social forces, the organised working class, was globally expanding and the least democratic (and most counter-revolutionary) of such forces, labourrepressive landlords, were disappearing. Global changes in capital accumulation, in the industrialisation of parts of the South and the deindustrialisation of much of the old heartlands of the North, thus provided the context for the shift to new forms of revolution. Where centralised insurgencies offering focused revolutionary programmes (e.g. in China or Cuba) had based their support on peasant communities, transition on the land brought more and more people to the cities, if not always to industrial jobs. New communications technologies allowed these urban inhabitants to gather in greater numbers around more evident sites of authority.46 These pre-eminently political revolutions depended upon a social context transformed by the previous revolutionary wave. The Arab revolutions were expected to follow this model, but they did not. Instead, they opened a new cycle, of increased and expanded contention facing renewed counter-revolution – but not the counter-revolutions of the partially agrarian past.

Within this cycle lay a paradox. As the Figure 1 demonstrates, the world has been becoming more revolutionary – in the sense of increasing numbers of revolutionary situations – even as revolutionary social transformation has decreased. Even the Arab counter-revolutions did not reverse this trend. The 2011 uprisings led to 'a wave of global protest intensity, decreasing through 2016, a second wave in 2017 and then a new wave beginning in late 2018' that continued until the end of the decade.47 The 2010s were a decade of protests and uprisings: mass protests increased by an annual average of 11.5 per cent from 2009 to 2019: the Middle East and North Africa saw the 'largest concentration of activity' and sub-Saharan Africa the 'fastest rate of growth'; a dip in protest activity in 2013–2017, coinciding with the high point of the Arab counter-revolutions, was followed by a renewed expansion of protest leading to 290.5 per cent more protests at the end of the 2010s than at the start.48

Despite this sharp rising trajectory across a decade, the quantitative increase and geographic spread of protest activity did not bring forth any example of decisive social revolution on the model of 1789 or 1917. From this absence stems the characterisation of these movements as an 'age of riots'. For Alain Bertho, the occupation of squares

and streets reflects the retreat of 'politics as subjective power' and the collapse of representative legitimacy. The flip-side of the square occupations are communal violence, and only 'jihadists' offer a clear sense of political subjectivity.49 In this reading, as noted in Chapter 2, the early twentyfirst century has witnessed a return of revolts, not revolutions.

Joshua Clover presents the most sophisticated version of this family of arguments, tracing the history of collective action in the shift from the early modern riot, to the industrial strike and then to the 'riot prime' of the post-1970s period. Each of these forms of collective action reflects, Clover argues, the dominant position of either circulation or production in the corresponding period of capitalist accumulation. The riot is a form of collective price-setting for goods in consumption, therefore, requiring no particular position in production: hence the predominance of this form of collective action in the mercantile period of early modern capitalism. The strike, by contrast, represents the collective setting of the price of labour and can only be carried out by workers with a position in production: hence the predominance of the strike in the industrial capitalism of particularly the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The 'riot prime',50 Clover argues, frequently directed against the police, corresponds to the logistical transformation of capital after the 1970s crisis, which shifted profit-making to circulation, thereby giving rise to 'surplus populations' unable to reproduce themselves by waged-labour and subject to the security management of the police. The revolutionary situations of the type described in chapter 3 then unite circulation and production struggles in the form of *reproduction*: yet their most salient examples in Tahrir and elsewhere foundered on the continued separation of the political and the economic.51

As we have seen in previous chapters, there is much evidence to support Clover's claims. The 'surplus populations' of the unand under-employed did form the hard core of the revolutionary subject engaged in street warfare against the police. Yet strikes, especially in Tunisia, Egypt and Bahrain, were also central to the uprisings. The two forms cannot be arbitrarily severed from one another. The policing of the boundary between social and political revolution, most notably in the policies of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Ennahda in Tunisia, did not (certainly in the former case) ensure the preservation of limited electoral democracy but its overthrow.

Indeed, the decade of protest globally and not just in Egypt or the Arab world was also a decade of increased democratic frailty, and resurgence of forms of politics Arno Mayer would term 'reactionary'– who 'propose to lead a retreat back into a world both lost and regretted' and 'denounce all their antagonists as devious conspirators'.52 The so-called third wave of democratisation identified by Samuel Huntington in the liberal revolutions of the 1980s seemed to be in retreat. The 'acceptance of democracy as the world's dominant form of governance' seemed 'under greater threat than at any point in the last twenty-five years'.53 Seen in this light, the combination of high levels of mobilisation with regression from even limited democratic outcomes in the Arab revolutions seems like less of an outlier and more of a precursor. By the end of the decade,

in the face of militias patrolling 'Black Lives Matter' protests, even the counterinsurgency strategist David Kilcullen was speaking of 'almost a prerevolutionary situation' in the United States.54

Democratisation theorists typically interpreted this phenomenon of democratic regression through a Cold War and post-Cold War lens: as the challenge of 'autocracy' – embodied in the regimes of China and Russia – to an extant liberal 'international community'.55 The example of the Arab counter-revolutions suggests different conclusions. The separation between political and social transformation promoted at the high point of liberal democratisation contributed to the success of these counter-revolutions. By the time the Arab uprisings occurred, liberal democracy had already been hollowed out. Reduced to a technical means of administration rather than contest between substantively different models of society, Western liberal democracy hardly offered a means by which the demands of 'bread, freedom and social justice' could be achieved. 'How', writes Wendy Brown, 'do subjects reduced to human capital reach for or even wish for popular power?'56 In the Arab republics, many such subjects reached instead for the promise of stability and the image of a better past. The Arab counter-revolutionaries did not have to invoke, as their European counterparts once had, an imagined prelapsarian past in the countryside – only the heritage of a more equitable development model still within the living memory of many of their citizens.

The Arab counter-revolutions that undid hopes for even limited democracy were directed, moreover, by fully capitalist ruling classes. None belonged, as we have seen, to the old agrarian order: all, even those in states such as Syria opposed to US dominance in the region, derived their wealth and status from state-led accumulation and regional alliances fully integrated into the world market. All had pioneered the policies of *infitah* neo-liberalism in the decades prior to the revolutions and continued to do so even amongst the ensuing ruins.57 States such as

Russia, Saudi Arabia and Iran certainly did play the role of 'black knights' in backing local counter-revolutions to the hilt – but so did, for example, the United States in Bahrain.58 These were counter-revolutions to *preserve* capitalist modernity, not prevent it.

The global changes in capital accumulation thus promoted different types of counter-revolutionary just as much as different types of revolutionary from past examples. The outsize role of agrarian exploiting classes was replaced in the Arab counter-revolutions with a financialised elite connected to the circulation of capital (primarily oil rent) throughout the region. The contending regional circuits of counter-revolution that developed after 2011were all vested in this circulation – the GCC, Iran, and Qatar/Turkey. Furthermore, in a global and regional context where the wage proved insufficient or unavailable to reproduce the lives of most citizens, access to employment and subsidies underpinned sectarianised counter-revolutionary coalitions. This was particularly visible in Syria and Bahrain, but the phenomenon was not restricted to these states.

Indeed, the Arab counter-revolutions extended beyond the Middle East. This was so in an empirical sense in the detail of alliances between the Arab counter-revolutions

and reactionary or authoritarian regimes elsewhere, and in the analogical counter-revolutionary movements that developed elsewhere. The first of these links is easier to establish. The rise to power of far-right, nationalist and authoritarian outsiders in the United States (the Trump administration), Brazil (the presidency of Jair Bolsonaro) and India (the longer-standing advent of the Hindu nationalist BJP to federal power) moved these states closer to the centres of Arab counter-revolution in the Gulf. The Assad regime was, of course, already firmly aligned with a non-democratic Russia and the hybrid theocratic-republic of Iran: Turkey's journey towards authoritarianism under Erdogan, and existing alliance with the Qatari monarchy, meant that none of the three major axes competing in the post-2011 Middle East could claim much in the way of democratic legitimacy.

Analogues between the Arab counter-revolutions and phenomena such as Trump, the BJP or 'populism' are more difficult to draw and call for caution. Although George Lawson, amongst others, identifies these forms of 'populism' as a major instance of con-temporary *revolutionary* movements, it is difficult to see them either as revolutionary or counter-revolutionary. Although these movements feature the 'division of society into antagonistic blocs', 'violent rhetoric and the seizure of political power in order to institute a transformative agenda',59 it is far from clear that such an agenda has been instituted by them or that power has indeed been seized. Bolsonaro, Trump and Modi reached office through the legitimate institutional means of their respective political systems: although all are characterised by an intense nativism and hatred of the Left, revolutionary or otherwise, none took power in the attempt to close an existing revolutionary situation or reverse a revolutionary movement. Although willing to undermine democracy, they have not proved – at least at the time of writing – so confident as actually to overthrow it, let alone replace it with a new party-state. Trump's failure to win a second term and the decline in popularity of Modi and Bolsonaro (at the time of writing) in the wake of their handling of the COVID-19 pandemic by no means indicates the end of such forms of farright politics.

At the heart of these projects lie the defence of national sovereignty and accompanying forms of nativism and caste, gender and race supremacy: if hostile to the global liberalism of the early twentieth century, none seeks to undo the social order as such nor restore a previous one. One of the lessons of the Arab uprisings – especially but not solely Egypt wherein secular liberals and Leftists enthusiastically joined the camp of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi – is that counter-revolutionary policies are as likely to find supporters amongst self-proclaimed progressives as they are among reactionary nativists. Analogues may still exist. It is quite possible that future counter-revolutionaries are indeed being bred amongst the supporters of Donald Trump – a possibility to which the 'insurrection' against the US Capitol Building of January 2021 – or Jair Bolsonaro or their counterparts elsewhere. Just as the Arab revolutions were in 2011, however, that is a history that is yet to be written.

Back Matter

Glossary

Aal Khalifa Monarchical ruling house of Bahrain.

Ahrar al-Sham Islamist militia in northern Syria: ideologically intermediate between *Jabhat al-Nusra* and FSA.

Azlam 'Cronies': term for counter-revolutionaries in Tunisia and Libya.

Baʿath Party Ruling party in Syria and formerly Iraq: officially the Arab Socialist Baʿath Party.

Baltageya 'Thugs': irregulars deployed to attack protests in Egypt.

Feloul 'Remnants': Egyptian term for counterrevolutionaries.

FSA Free Syrian Army: loose federation of armed Syrian opposition groups.

GNA Government of National Accord: internationally recognised interim government of Libya headed by Fayez al-Sarraj.

GPC General People's Congress: Yemeni ruling party in 2011.

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham

'Levant Liberation Committee': Sunni Islamist militia alliance in northern Syria, dominated by organisational descendants of *Jabhat al-Nusra.*

Hiraak 'Movement': southern separatists in Yemen.

Hizballah 'The Party of God': Lebanese Shi'a Islamist militia formed to resist Israeli occupation. Aligned with Iran.

Houthis Officially 'Ansar Allah', 'Supporters of God':

Zaydi revivalist movement and militia in Yemen.

ISIS The Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham: Sunni Islamist militia and state-building movement.

Islah Officially 'the Yemeni Congregation for Reform': Yemeni Islamist party which includes the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafis.

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Jabhat alNusra

'The Supporters' Front', later *Jabhat Fateh alSham* ('Front for the Conquest of the Levant'): Sunni Islamist militia, aligned with al-Qaeda.

JMP Joint Meeting Parties: Yemeni opposition bloc.

LCCs Local Co-ordinating Committees: organising committees of Syrian protests.

LNA Libyan National Army: Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar's forces.

Mukhabarat Blanket term for internal security agencies throughout the region.

Muslim Brotherhood

Sunni Islamist groups present throughout the region.

NDF National Defence Forces (*Quwaat al-Difaaꞌ alWatanii*): Syrian pro-regime militias.

NDP National Democratic Party: pre-2011 ruling party in Egypt.

Nidaa Tounes 'Call of Tunis': Tunisian political party organising old regime forces.

NSF National Salvation Front: anti-Morsi alliance in Egypt.

NUG National Unity Gathering: Sunni countermovement to 2011 uprising in Bahrain.

PKK 'Kurdistan Workers' Party': Kurdish guerrilla movement in Turkey.

PYD 'Democratic Union Party': PKK sister organisation in Syria.

RCD 'Democratic Constitutional Rally': pre-2011 ruling party in Tunisia.

Saꞌada Hereditary caste claiming descent from the prophet, prominent in Yemen and Iraq.

SDF Syrian Democratic Forces: anti-ISIS militia alliance in northern Syria, dominated by YPG and supported by the United States.

Shabiha 'Ghosts': blanket term for pro-regime paramilitaries in Syria.

SNC Syrian National Coalition or 'Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces': external Syrian opposition leadership body.

Tamarrod 'Resistance': anti-Morsi protest movement in Egypt.

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TEV-DEM 'Movement for a Democratic Society': umbrella body for parties and movements supporting the PYD project of democratic confederalism in northern Syria.

YPG 'People's Protection Units': militia of the PYD.

Notes

Chapter 1

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4 As I explain in Chapter 3, the argument presented here considers the upris ings that occurred in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain and Syria to have been revolutions, albeit mostly defeated ones. For the sake of intelligi bility, however, I will also make use of the now common coinage 'Arab Spring' while acknowledging the political critique to which it has been subject.

5 There have been several iterations of the acronym for this organization ISIS, ISIL, IS, *daesh* but in this book I shall use 'ISIS' throughout. This usage implies neither acceptance of the group's claim to 'Islamic' statehood, nor of the odd convention of combining English (Iraq) and Arab ('al sham') in one acronym but simply the established informal usage in English.

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Chapter 2

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Chapter 5

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