

BOOK REVIEW

Arab Spring: negotiating in the shadow of the *intifadat*, edited by I. William Zartman, Athens, The University of Georgia Press, 2015, xviii + 478 pp., \$32.95 (softcover), ISBN 978-08203-4825-4

This book deserves a review, however late in coming, to celebrate the audacity of understanding the Arab Spring as processes of negotiation.¹ William Zartman, in a lengthy introductory essay, spells out the model: 'To build a new state, in whole or in part, societies needed to construct – to negotiate – a broad coalition of forces in order to devise – negotiate – a consensual formula for a social contract' (4). Professor Zartman is a seasoned scholar of international negotiations as well as the politics of North Africa, and combines his skills in offering his model for negotiating a new political order against which he compares the patterns of 'negotiations' taken by the uprisings. He extends 'negotiations' far beyond conventional understandings of fixed parties transacting around a table to include vertical transactions with civil society and street demonstrations and processes whereby new parties bubble up to various surface levels. In short, 'negotiations' get stretched 'to include any process where positions are developed and then made to fit into a joint decision by parties at any level' (7).

He notes, however, that at least three of his contributors insisted on more conventional usages of the term (6). The very titles of the chapters by Hugh Roberts, 'Algeria, The Negotiations that Aren't', and by Aly El Raggal and Heba Raouf Ezzat, 'Egypt: Can a Revolution Be Negotiated?' suggested negotiations to be a blind alley, at least for viewing their segments of the Arab Spring. The latter pair of scholars did their best to work within a framework of 'asymmetrical' and 'failed' negotiations but argued that a successful transition 'might require not only negotiations but also mediation by neutral parties, who were missing in the Egyptian case' (83). Yet they also invented a new actor much in keeping with the editor's elastic conception of negotiations. Egypt's new actor in Tahrir Square and elsewhere was like a rhizome, a term derived from agriculture. 'According to the Oxford dictionary, a *rhizome* is a continuously growing horizontal underground stem which puts out lateral shoots and adventitious roots at intervals' (87), like bamboo shoots invading a neighbour's garden beneath fences. Since the authors conclude that 'the resistance and flourishing of the rhizome continues' (113) in the hyper-authoritarian context of Field Marshal Sisi's Egypt, readers may conclude that the Revolution of 25 January 2011 lives on, the title of their essay ending with an open question mark.

Zartman wishes to describe and explain the patterns of negotiations that evolved in the Arab Spring. The various case studies covered in the book fit along three time frames (425), short track transition (Tunisia and Egypt), long track transition (Libya, Syria, Yemen), and short track reaction (Morocco, Algeria, and Bahrain). The short track transitions are respectively associated with the activities of parties competing in Tunisia and pacting in Egypt, whereas the long track

transitions reflect the fragmenting of various actors in Libya, Syria, and Yemen. Short track reactions consisted of the old orders adapting in Morocco and Algeria to their uprisings or repressing them (with the help of outside Saudi and Emirati forces) in Bahrain. 'These types [of transition activities] are not permanent and may evolve into each other' (25): thus pacting in Egypt resulted in repression after a 'fragile seesaw' of opaque negotiations between the military and the Muslim Brotherhood. In his concluding essay Zartman tries to explain the differences in outcome between Tunisia and Egypt by the theorem of a French nobleman described in 1789 in the French Constituent Assembly. The Lally-Tolendal Theorem holds that

A single power will necessarily end by devastating everything. Two powers will fight until one of them has crushed the other. But three will maintain themselves in perfect equilibrium ... when two are fighting each other, the third, being equally interested in maintaining the one and the other, will join the oppressed against the oppressor, and thus restore peace among all. (424)

Whatever the successes of pacting transitions to democracy in Latin America,

Arab Spring pacting is inherently unstable because its very dynamic incites each party to try for a permanent advantage to unseat the other, if only in defense against the other's presumed tactic in the same direction – a veritable security dilemma, as in Egypt. (425)

In Tunisia, by contrast, on the 'short track' leading to the overthrow of Ben Ali and the negotiation of a new constitution, the transition dynamic was political pluralism rather than a binary seesaw associated with pacting. The very title of the essay on Tunisia by Abdelwahab Ben Hafaieth and Zartman conveys the idea of pluralism: 'Beyond the Ideological Cleavage: Something Else'. What was this 'something?' The authors say it was 'an effort of adaptation and compromise' (50), begging the question, but their detailed narrative of events introduces not only horizontal coalition building associated with political pluralism but also tacit vertical negotiations between formal bodies and the street. Most important of all for explaining the 'something' was 'a unique bicameral system ... a lower and "much lower" house, the latter in the form of the National Dialogue, with some 150 members unelected but consensual in its formation and operation' (69). It echoed an earlier informal High Authority for the Realization of the Revolution that shaped the legislation from March 2011 leading up to the elections in October of the Tunisian Constituent Assembly. The informal bodies in effect represented civil society, the real 'something' that secured Tunisia's political transition to democracy rather than some form of dictatorship as in Egypt.

Hugh Roberts's brilliant discussion of Algeria, the dog that did not bark in the Arab Spring, offers a key contrast between Algeria and Tunisia that incidentally highlights the latter's achievement. Roberts paints an Algerian contrast of hopelessly impotent intermediaries between state and society. The only parties sufficiently respected to be negotiating partners are the ones with armed followings, such as the Islamic Salvation Front's armed force in 1997, not its civilian leadership (162-163). In fact, massive uprisings can't really happen in Algeria because

the state has the power to manipulate disaffected youth, whether in October 1988, in Kabylia in 2001, or in Oran and Algiers in January 2011, when their energies were exhausted in violence and discredited before political parties could channel them and make political demands. At best local disturbances, up to 30 or more each day, send messages to local authorities. There can be no real interest aggregation, just at best narrow articulations of economic interests in ad hoc negotiations of the sort that happened in the spring and summer of 2011. Or factions may covertly negotiate with one another within ruling circles; indeed explanations of the violence in January 2011 link it to factional struggles between President Bouteflika's close circle and General Mohammed Mediene's military intelligence services. Intelligent policing discredited any idea of a popular uprising against the sclerotic regime.

Algeria's short track reaction to the Arab Spring was selectively to meet economic demands of specific groups while promising eventual political reforms. So also in Morocco, the monarchy expeditiously responded, adapting to popular demonstrations rather than suppressing them as in Bahrain. But, as in Algeria, Amy Hamblin observes that 'negotiations were little part of the equation' (182). Instead, leaders of the February 20 movement were contacted and occasionally co-opted, receiving jobs and the like, but never engaged as partners in negotiations. The monarchy simply bestowed 'a litany of constitutional reforms' (182) while peeling off key elements of the popular movement that gradually dissipated by summer. Moroccan intermediaries were perhaps stronger than their Algerian counterparts but the monarchy also had greater experience in divide and rule tactics honed over more than 350 years, especially in recent decades.


Poor Libya is the only North African case of a long track transition. What distinguished the short from long track transitions is that the incumbent military did not make war on the demonstrators. Zartman also suggests that the willingness of the government to negotiate regime changes and the commitment of all parties to the state and its judiciary system distinguish Egypt and Tunisia from the long track transitions. And indeed, as Karim Mezran and Alice Alumni point out, Leader Qadhafi rejected all calls for negotiation and threatened the Benghazi opposition with annihilation. When the united opposition, with the help of NATO's intervention, finally caught and killed Qadhafi, analysed game theoretically in Johannes Theiss's chapter, it fragmented into component militias, transitioning Libya within three years from one civil war to another. It may be this spectre of their neighbour's disintegration as well as memories of its own jihadi violence in the 1990s that keeps Algeria's regime in power.

In conclusion, Fen Osler Hampson and Bessma Momani offer some policy 'lessons learned' about the impacts of external interventions to the Arab Spring. In North Africa the big one was NATO in Libya, and the big one missing concerned Egypt. The writers do not question the NATO military intervention, only its lack of a coherent political follow through. They argue that a more proactive US intermediary role for Egypt, using military aid as leverage, might have forestalled Sisi's coup (441), but they also prudently warn of possible local reactions against too much civil society capacity building. Any transfers of negotiating skills would be

highly problematic, however key they may be to political development as envisioned in this book.

Note

1. The book is published in The University of Georgia Press's Studies in Security and International Affairs series. This review covers only the North African cases, not Bahrain, Syria, Yemen, or the comparators of South Africa and Serbia.

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