

SECOND DRAFT:
MAY 2012

Abstract of a Longer Essay

**BETWEEN THE ARAB SPRING
AND THE AFRICAN AWAKENING:
AN AFRO-ARAB RENAISSANCE**

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What has been dubbed “the Arab Spring” should more appropriately be called either “the Afrabian Awakening” or “the Afro-Arab Spring.” Until now the leadership of North Africa in the Arab spring has been underestimated.

First and foremost, the prodemocracy uprisings started in Tunisia and Egypt (later joined by NATO-backed Libyan revolt). The Arab countries outside Africa joined later.

For a whole year the only revolts which succeeded in ousting unwanted dictators were the North African revolts. The Heads of State of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya were indeed ousted. A non-African Arab regime was not ousted until 2012 (the fall of President Saleh of Yemen).

A third reason for calling these revolts “Afro-Arab Spring or Awakening” were the precedents of unarmed Sudanese revolts against the military government of General Abboud in 1964 and the similar Sudanese popular uprising against the military government of General Jaafar Numeiri in 1985. The precedents were set in Sudan a quarter of a century before Tunisia and Egypt. However, the Sudanese uprisings were subsequently followed by Islamization in Northern Sudan, rather than democratization.

BETWEEN TWO LIBERATION STRUGGLES

But why has Afrabian pro-democracy struggle occurred now? Some have suggested that it is due to the delayed demonstration effect of the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. This theory overlooks the fact that what is

happening now in North Africa is a continuation of an earlier *African* trend south of the Sahara. The Soweto *intifadah* (uprising) in 1976 may be more relevant for Africa's pro-democracy movement from the 1990s than were demonstrations in Prague in 1989. The Sudanese riots in the streets of Khartoum helped to bring dictator Jaafar Numeiri down in 1985 — well before the world knew much about the liberal Mikhail Gorbachev.

Yoweri Museveni in Uganda went to the bushes to create an army against Milton Obote's dictatorship way back in 1981. Museveni waged a war for several years — and defeated the official army of a post-colonial state. The struggle owed nothing to any East European inspiration. There was no such inspiration.

But why then has Afrabia's struggle occurred now? Causal factors include the so-called “revolution of rising frustrations” in the post-colonial world. That revolution had already reached its crest in the last years of the twentieth century. Most post-colonial governments have not only failed to meet the original “revolution of rising expectations”; the African governments have often caused decay rather than development. Their populations have therefore been ready from the late 1980s to demonstrate for change in the streets of African capitals.

A related reason as to why new pro-democracy movements are occurring in 2011 and 2012 is the re-emergence of African's democratic instinct which had previously taken the form mainly of anti-colonialism. In its earlier manifestation Africa's democratic instinct had sought realization through nationalism. The result was Africa's first liberation struggle.

But Africa's democratic instinct has now inaugurated a second liberation struggle. If the first one was against alien rule, this new crusade is for African democracy. If the first liberation effort was for political independence, this second struggle is for wider human rights. If the first endeavor was for collective self-determination, this second liberation struggle is for individual fulfillment.

When Africa's democratic instinct took the form of nationalism, almost no price was too high for collective freedom. Algeria paid with a million lives in the war for independence between 1954 and 1962 — the most costly anti-colonial war in Africa in the second half of the twentieth century. Countries like Kenya, Zimbabwe, Angola, Mozambique and Namibia sacrificed many lives for national liberation.

It remains to be seen whether this new incarnation of Africa's will in this new 21st century produce as great a readiness for sacrifice among Africans as the struggle for independence had elicited. Will Africans be as ready to die for individual rights and civil liberties as they once were for national self-determination? The answer is in the womb of history for the time being. The future of democracy in Africa is uncertain in spite of the Afrabian awakening. In North Africa will the uprising be followed by Islamization, or democratization, or both?

The striking thing about *South Africa* is that it has *telescoped the two liberation struggles* — the contextual struggle for collective self-determination and the socio-democratic struggle for individual rights and social justice.

Juridically the country has had some degree of independence since 1910 — but in reality it was independence just for the white population of South Africa. What happened from 1910 onwards was *the internalization of white colonialism*. Both the Union of South Africa and the Republic of South Africa became a classic case of undigested internal imperialism.

The Black against Black violence elsewhere in Africa happened usually soon after political decolonization — as in the Congo in 1960 (general collapse), or in Zimbabwe (Shona vs. Ndebele) or the Nigerian Civil War (1966–1970) or the first Sudanese Civil War (1955–1972) (1983 to present).

If South Africa's Black against Black violence were *instead* of a civil war after liberation, that would indeed be a bargain. After all, post-colonial civil wars are *better armed*, and *more deadly*, than pre-independence mob violence. Let us hope South Africans get so satiated with blood and violence before liberation that the country becomes a paragon of peace thereafter.

Be that as it may, Africa's second liberation struggle is about popular participation, governmental accountability, the open society and social justice. In South Africa the two liberation struggles are fusing into a potential synthesis. A continent holds its breath as this new century of destiny unfolds.

THE GENDER QUESTION

An area of *social solidarity* which may be underdeveloped is solidarity with the *WOMEN* of Africa. And yet this is a very sensitive area.

Some foreign aid for *FAMILY PLANNING* is more a case of cultural cooptation than solidarity — seeking to win over Africans (both male and female) to the Western philosophy on family-size — “*Small is beautiful*,” Western family planners believe. African philosophy on family size — on the other hand — is predicated on the proposition that “*BIG IS BLISS*.”

It is true that Africa has the fastest growth-rate in population in the world. Kenya’s growth rate has sometimes been the highest of any society in human history — sometimes over 4% per year. Is family-size Africa’s last bastion of self-determination? Should Western donors refrain from cooptation in this field?

What about cooptation of African women to Western-style *feminist movements*? Comprehensive Westernization of the gender question in Africa through *external* influence is risky — but the West can target specific goals, such as:

- (a) Working out strategies for “*Women in Development*”
- (b) Training *African women farmers*
- (c) Supporting *women marketing enterprises* or commercial activities
- (d) Extending *general education* for women and skill-transfer
- (e) Improving prospects for *safe child-bearing* (safe motherhood)
- (f) More accessible *clean water* — cutting distances for women to walk and improving the health of their children
- (g) More efficient uses of *firewood* reduces distances and frequencies covered for its collection

(h) Above all, female empowerment in both politics and society should have full priority.