

# Introduction

## Beginning Again?

### *The Question of a Continent*

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The question of Africa is open—again. The promise of an African Renaissance remains unfilled. The hope of the Afro-Arab Spring waxes and wanes.<sup>1</sup> There is too much change and there is too little—the winds of change blow with ferocity and then not at all. While professing a commitment to transformation, governments remain loath to risk change that might undermine their own power. Dissatisfaction grows but remains unheard. Dissent coalesces into movements that seem to lack direction let alone a sense of a clear endgame. Over and over, the first act of the play promises a revolution that comes to naught in the second. The urgent desire to begin again is cut short—again.

This book does not aim to answer the question of Africa—the question itself has yet to be properly and fully understood! Nor does it attempt to speak for the continent—how to move beyond such (mis)representations is surely part of the question at hand, particularly given the ways in which Africa is often referred to as if it were a single country. Rather, its wager is that the contemporary question of Africa may emerge partly in the light of the African Renaissance *and* the Afro-Arab Spring. All too often, it seems that these two phenomena—whether understood as heterogeneous events, complex discourses, or modes of transformation—are unfolding in different worlds. The distance may prove costly, not least if the widespread desire for rebirth and the hope of popular democratic movements both speak to the question of Africa's historical definition and how it may yet define itself—for itself.

Looking from south to north and back again, the chapters that compose this book investigate the respective dynamics of renaissance and renewal. At one level,

this inquiry sheds important light on the possibilities, dilemmas, and risks of radical political, economic, and cultural change in contemporary Africa and what may be expected if such change fails to unfold. At another, it opens space to ask whether and how the Afro-Arab Spring and the African Renaissance are underwritten by a shared concern for a common set of problems—that is, a collection of issues that confound the continent’s politics, constrain its development, and limit its role on the world stage. Individually and together, the critical reflections that follow demonstrate that, in the name of beginning again, Africa is struggling anew—and in new ways—with how to best promote political freedom, economic equality, transitional justice, religious tolerance, and the rejuvenation of culture. The stakes of these struggles are high.

## A Resonating Question of Change

It has been twenty years since Nelson Mandela stood on the steps of the Union Building in Pretoria and heralded the beginning of South Africa’s nonracial democracy. An event that few predicted, South Africa’s turn from apartheid was a watershed moment for the country and the continent. With it came one of the world’s most progressive constitutions, a dramatic new approach to political transition, and a palpable sense that Africa had turned a decisive corner. This optimism was evident in a variety of ways. With Mandela’s leadership, the underlying logic of South Africa’s negotiated revolution was deployed in the name of resolving several of the continent’s ongoing conflicts. To the fascination of national, continental, and international audiences, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) appeared to turn standing norms of transitional justice on their head.

In mid-1997, just a year after the TRC began its work, Thabo Mbeki, who was then South Africa’s deputy president, traveled to the United States and delivered a lengthy speech in which he declared that “the African Renaissance is upon us.” The claim was both an assessment and a call for action. As Mbeki put it, “It is not given to every generation that it should be present during and participate in the act of creation. I believe that ours is privileged to occupy such a space.” Supported not least by the South African “miracle,” there was an opportunity to begin again:

This generation remains African and carries with it an historic pride which compels it to seek a place for Africans equal to all the other peoples of our common universe. It knows and is resolved that, to attain that objective, it must resist all tyranny, oppose all attempts to deny liberty by resort to demagoguery, repulse the temptation to describe African life as the ability to live on charity, engage the fight to secure the emancipation of the African woman, and reassert the fundamental concept that we are our own liberators from oppression, from underdevelopment and poverty, from

the perpetuation of an experience from slavery, to colonisation, to apartheid, to dependence on alms.<sup>2</sup>

While this vision for an African Renaissance did not initially attract the same kind of attention as Mandela's magnanimity and the TRC's efforts to come to terms with the past, Mbeki's resolve was rewarded. Through an extended campaign, one that very much defined his abruptly ended presidency, the promise of a renaissance is now a central thread in African political discourse. It frames policy debates over national, continental, and global economic growth and redistribution, shapes the form and content of Pan-Africanism, invigorates thought about the nature and power of African culture, and challenges Africa's leaders not only to represent but also to honor the will of those they claim to serve. Today, the African Renaissance is an idea that matters.

The ultimate importance of Mbeki's vision may be its implicit warning—miracles are not enough. Transitions do not ensure democracy. The retreat of colonial power does not assure material equality. Africa's independence does not guarantee its standing in the world. A generation on, there is increasing evidence to suggest that this warning has not been taken to heart, by either supporters or critics of the renaissance. Discontent is growing. The gap between expectation and reality is increasing. The relationship between accountability and power is far from stable. The rift between haves and have-nots is deepening.<sup>3</sup> The line between the slow process of reconciliation and undue waiting is increasingly blurry. A country and continent is still waiting for its rebirth. And while fundamental transformation does not and cannot happen overnight, the promise of transition and transformation can only go unkept for so long. At some point, discontent erupts into something more.

More than four decades before South Africa's transition, in July 1952, a Free Officers' revolution, spearheaded by Gamal Abdel Nasser in the wake of Arab nationalism, promised an end to monarchical authoritarianism and colonial hegemony. Sub-Saharan African leaders were inspired by this movement. Mandela himself identified with the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962) against French colonialism and traveled there during the revolutionary phase of his career. Yet, Egypt, the most influential Arab country in North Africa and the Middle East, gradually slipped into a military dictatorship, as did Algeria. It took the Iranian revolution of 1979, under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini, to kindle the aspirations of Muslim-majority nations—from Mauritania to the Maldives Islands—for freedom from political tyranny and autocratic rule. However, Iran's revolutionary zeal could not transform the country into a model Islamic democracy, nor could it curb Iran's enthusiasm for exporting Shiite theocracy. And in the wake of the catastrophic and debilitating war with Iraq, Iran gradually became an authoritarian theocracy, albeit more democratic than any of its neighbors.

Iran's repression of the Green Movement, following the disputed 2009–2010 elections that returned President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to office, was a harbinger of what was to follow a year later in the Arabic-speaking world. On January 14, 2011, mass uprisings ousted the Tunisian dictator, Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali. In Egypt, Hosni Mubarak was removed from power on February 11, 2011, and on October 20, 2011, Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi was captured and killed. In the aftermath of these events, three dynamics have done much to frame the terms and define the momentum of the Afro-Arab Spring. First, Tunisia continued on a wobbly path of transition to democracy. Second, Syria remains in the grip of a fratricidal civil war with no end in sight, with its instability bleeding into neighboring Iraq. Feeling disenfranchised by the ruling Shiites, Iraq's Sunni population seems to have fallen under the spell of an al-Qaeda-affiliated insurgency called the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Whether Iraq will be partitioned remains to be seen. But there is every sign of serious instability in Iraq in the foreseeable future with proxy wars between Sunni and Shia being sponsored by Iraq's neighbors. And third, Egypt, the beacon and hope for rebirth in the Arabic-speaking world, undertook a path to democracy with the election of Mohamed Morsi in June 2012, a path that was shortened when he was deposed by Abdel Fattah el-Sisi following a wave of popular protest. In May 2014 el-Sisi, then field marshal, was elected to power in a lackluster show of democracy—47 percent of voters turned out for a contest in which el-Sisi won with 97 percent of the vote.

Eruption has very much defined popular interpretations of the uprisings that have profoundly and variously altered the landscapes of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and other countries of the Sahara, the Sahel, and further in the Central African Republic (CAR), Mali, Nigeria and Sudan. Save for Tunisia, the Afro-Arab Spring did not simply or quietly emerge. As Garth le Pere puts it: "In the broader Afro/Arab region the waves of protests and social upheavals that drew their impulse from and were emboldened by the North African experience were driven by similar structural factors. Most crucial among these were changing demographic dynamics and realities, the failure of authoritarian paternalist regimes, and popular demands for greater political participation and representation."<sup>4</sup>

What hangs in the balance is the question of power—its location, distribution, and capacity to gather the forces of democratization, faith, and culture and render them into coherent and ethical forms of governance. The question is large, complex, and fraught. Hopes for a season of regeneration have given way to stifling heat. Spring has become a crucible. While millions of people gathered in so many squares around the world to express their frustrations and hopes, there may well have been a shortage of vision and a dearth of practitioners who could translate mass power into sustainable reform. Without an ethical sense of renaissance, premised on human decency and political agility, visionary wisdom, compassion, and pragmatism, the movement seems unlikely to generate fundamental change.

What runs between the Cape and Cairo? This question has been asked before—with disastrous results. Today, it is tempting to view the African Renaissance and the Afro-Arab Spring as counterparts, if not two pieces that somehow speak to the whole. From such a perspective, events in the north and south are moments in which Africa has defied its history in the name of making history and creating an unprecedented opportunity for political transformation and cultural-social renewal. Similarly, the events between 1994 and 2014—the span between the birth of democracy in South Africa and the installation of the military through the ballot box in Egypt—can be read as mirror images: the risk of the renaissance’s failure can be seen in the tumult of spring just as the impulses of a new season can easily and swiftly wither if they are not guided by an ethics and architecture for renewal.

Yet, for all their intuitive appeal, these assessments may be premature. Humility and decency require that we hope for better outcomes, but we should not be blinded by reality. It is perhaps too soon to make definitive claims about whether these events are readily comparable, let alone related. For one, the popular movements that have defined the Arab Spring have not relied on the discourse that underwrites the campaign for an African Renaissance. The uprising brought the fall of several leaders who embraced the call for a renaissance at the same time that many of those who have led the Afro-Arab Spring, with notable exceptions in Tunisia, have largely ignored Thabo Mbeki’s principled call that a renaissance must “resist all tyranny, oppose all attempts to deny liberty by resort to demagoguery,” and foster self-reliance. At a larger level, the impulse of the Afro-Arab Spring is not singular. Countries and regions have approached it variously, contingent on particular political, cultural, social, and regional milieus such that there is no obvious way to wrap the call for renewal into the fold of rebirth. The difficulty is underscored by the widespread presumption, readily evident in the media, that one event is largely a product of West Asia while the other is a properly African initiative.

All of this reflects the difficulty of speaking to the question of Africa and identifying the forces that may or may not be reshaping its landscape. At one level the difficulty has much to do with how external powers long dominated the continent without ever recognizing it. Africa was left to float. Neither here nor there, it existed in a nonactual (or exotic) way. It did not actually matter, which meant that its exploitation came with no burden of accountability. At another level, however, the question of Africa has more than a little to do with a certain ambivalence that surrounds the idea of “Africa” for many of those who nevertheless identify as African. The Arabic-speaking world, despite immense oil riches in some parts, remains largely at the mercy of external powers, especially the United States, Europe, and now increasingly Russia and China in a unipolar world. A century ago the revolutionary Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, who with his cohort of scholar activists popularized Islamic reform, warned that internal despotism and

external imperialism were the lethal enemies of the Islamic world and the developing world.

The South African author Zakes Mda suggests that the idea of an “African identity” and the quest for “African unity” are recent phenomena. Arabs at the turn of the Common Era used the word *Afriquia* for what is today the Arabic and Berber-speaking parts of the African continent. The Romans, in turn, captured Carthage in 146 CE and soon extended their dominance from parts of modern Libya to Mauritania. They referred to the region as their African proconsular province. Berber-speaking nomadic people in North Africa and the Maghreb, across the Sahara and into the Sahel—were every bit as African as Bantu-speaking people in sub-Saharan Africa. Mda makes the point that until about a hundred years ago the inhabitants of the continent did not generally refer to themselves as Africans. They recognized and celebrated various identities that were based on ethnicity, clan, family, gender, language, and class while recognizing a common humanity that bound the different groups together, which allowed a particular group to be absorbed into another group, either in peace building or through war. They called themselves *Abantu*, *Khoikhoi*, and other names that designate and validate the humanity of the different groups. As such, Mda suggests the notion of being African is “an identity-in-the-making.”<sup>5</sup> Africa includes a plurality of identities that make for a common humanity although this propensity, like so many other cultural values, is often forgotten. It could, nevertheless, be a significant anthropological contribution that Africa makes to the global debate on coexistence and identity.<sup>6</sup>

In a certain sense, the expectation for stable African unity is a colonial imposition. Yet, at institutional and local levels, the professed appeal of Pan-Africanism is frequently obscured by endless ideological debates over how best to create unity while at the same being trumped by economic nationalism that sometimes boils over into overt xenophobia or territorial wars. If such divisions reflect the fact that the African continent’s diverse politics, cultures, and languages afford no ready way for its fifty-four countries to interact, they also demonstrate the continuing struggle to dismantle the line that has long separated northern and southern Africa. As famously inscribed by Hegel, this line was all but unbreachable: “Africa proper” existed only “to the land south of the Sahara desert,” a land and people that lacked “any integral ingredient of culture” and “no history in the true sense of the word.”<sup>7</sup> Today, in the wake of the colonialism that Hegel helped legitimize, this line is an unofficial but altogether real referent for disputes over where to find the continent’s real power and how to explain the various forces that are presently reshaping Africa.

Yet the line that divides Africa through a desert is as artificial as the line that separates it from West Asia or East of Suez. Populations in Yemen, parts of today’s Saudi Arabia, and other countries of the Arabian Gulf not only share a vast ocean border with the Horn of Africa and the African east coast as far as Mozambique,

but they also share an Afro-Arab ethnicity dating back beyond a millennium. Africa and West Asia together make up more than half of the world's Muslim population, sharing a common yet internally diverse religious and cultural heritage. Africa makes up at least 45 percent of the estimated 1.2 billion Muslims globally. And some 32 percent of Christianity's estimated 2.18 billion adherents reside in Africa, in all their ecumenical, racial, and linguistic diversity. In addition, some 13 million Christians reside in Arabic-speaking North Africa and the Middle East. Apart from Israel, a significant portion of the world's Jewish community lives in South Africa with dwindling populations in North Africa. At the same time indigenous African religious traditions survive independently and in the diaspora, where they remain in lived conversation with forms of Islam and Christianity. In other words, the complex cultural and faith tapestry of Africa constitutes a phenomenal experiment in the intertwined destinies of various sections of humankind in what scholars from Toynbee to the American historian Marshall Hodgson identified as part of the Afro-Eurasian *oikoumene*, an ensemble of civilizations that gives this contiguous landmass a unique history. The rich potential of this cultural and civilizational diversity has yet to be fully understood by either advocates of an African renaissance or Arab reformers. A crucial question is whether both Islam and Christianity can play a vital role in the reconstruction of society in the same measure to which they both gave prophetic voice to grievances and dissatisfaction.

The assumption that what happens on the continent must necessarily have continental implications is simplistic and flouted by both history and facts on the ground. In the same breath, real-time events demonstrate that northern and southern Africa cannot be cordoned off and reduced to different worlds. One thing is certain: The African Renaissance and the Afro-Arab Spring reverberate. Large-scale migration from North African and sub-Saharan regions toward southern Africa and across the Mediterranean has already altered the landscapes of both regions by increasing the threads of an unanticipated but hopefully life-giving cosmopolitanism. The impact of the Afro-Arab Spring is evident in the Ansar al-Sharia, remnants of Colonel Muammar Qaddafi's African mercenaries who caused widespread political upheaval in Mali. In Northern Nigeria the group Boko Haram has invited international condemnation for its widespread terror and destruction, and the civil war in Somalia has yet to abate. The relative courses of the Arab Spring and the aspirations for an African Renaissance are felt across countries, regions, the continent, and the world.

With yet uncertain outcomes, the Afro-Arab Spring and African Renaissance are felt at personal, political, cultural, and economic levels. And, thus, what reverberates resonates. For all their potential differences and similarities, the two movements evoke one another. They sound calls for fundamental change that do not so much echo one another as coalesce into a deep and unsettling vibration. This

vibration runs through bodies, communities, and institutions. It runs across borders. It runs backward and forward, to and fro, an oscillating movement that may shatter concentration or form the basis of rhythm. The ambiguity is a question of equilibrium—past, present, and future.

What resonates from the Cape to Cairo is a set of interlocking questions. Some of these questions have yet to be fully formulated. Many have yet to be taken up in a detailed way. All of them are increasingly urgent. How are the African Renaissance and Afro-Arab Spring both underwritten by a concern for how oppressed and alienated people regain human dignity? What are the structural, political, and cultural obstacles to modes of radical transformation that account for historical injustice without rebalkanizing society? Do these obstacles suggest ways in which the unfinished project of renaissance can inform the work of an open-ended spring? How do the popular and unstable democratic movements in North Africa bear on the promise of a continental rebirth that appeared to first take hold in the south? How are these two events reshaping the meaning of Africa? Around what problems do they coalesce and intersect? What do the African Renaissance and the Afro-Arab Spring reveal about Africa's pasts? What do they portend for its futures?

## Revolutionary Dilemmas

Africa stands at a moment when it can move in any number of directions, some for better and some for worse. But, of course! Why should it be otherwise? For century upon century, Africa's "ambiguity" has been figured as a problem and then used as a pretense to exploit the continent's "contingent" resources, colonize its "wayward" people, and impose plans for its "proper" development. It is worth saying in the clearest possible terms: Some visions of African stability have amounted to little more than criminal intent; some forms of its unity have promised stability at the cost of devastating division; some calls for its development have been wholly disingenuous attempts to paralyze its creativity. The question of Africa cannot be answered until it is honestly posed—as a question.

Is Africa restless? It is, although this diagnosis comes with no small amount of baggage. The much vaunted end of history was never much more than an opening for so-called realists to predict and peddle a "clash of civilizations," a barely politically correct rendition of that old chestnut: The natives are restless and must be calmed—by whatever means necessary and for everyone's good. At some level, this is still the message. Too often it seems that the drone strikes stop only long enough for Western leaders to complete whistle-stop tours dedicated to preaching the gospel of sincere assistance on the condition of temperance.<sup>8</sup> True restlessness is a function of being told to stay in one's place.

Across Africa, the weight of the past continues to unsettle even as fewer and fewer are willing to accept that history can be blamed for all the problems at hand. While the Western human rights industry could not quite grasp it, there was something quite proper and perhaps even good about Robert Mugabe's 2002 proclamation: "So Blair, keep your England and let me keep my Zimbabwe." The difficulty, however, was that Mugabe's position negligently begged the questions of how liberation struggles can be remade into sustainable and just forms of government and the conditions under which heroic leaders of independence movements must be held responsible for trampling on the freedoms of those they claim to represent. The double bind is difficult to cut. Too often, hair-trigger critics naively presuppose that transitions nullify the force of history and the leaders of new governments have always had access to power. And, just as often, new leaders create unrealistic expectations in order to rationalize their unbridled appropriation of sovereign power.

Ali Mazrui suggests that the impact of Western colonialism on Africa was and is essentially "shallow rather than deep, transitional rather than long-lasting."<sup>9</sup> He argues that although it was never fully internalized by Africans, the colonial form of control through a supreme governor, assisted by carefully chosen magistrates and native chiefs, was nevertheless adopted by postindependence leaders. His analysis holds true for Middle Eastern rulers too. Western colonialism, Mazrui argues, has given rise to a brand of African leaders who have seized the material benefits of Western forms of capitalism through militarization and privatization at the same time that they neglect transparent and accountable governance, democratic values, and human rights.

In one sense, the past is never past—inherited structures and norms haunt each generation in ways that can never be fully anticipated and that leave it under-equipped to deal fully with new challenges. Responding to the industrial revolution that swept across England and Europe in the latter decades of the eighteenth century, Karl Marx warned that "the tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living."<sup>10</sup> In another sense, however, the past is a choice, a decision about what to remember and what to forget. Every generation confronts this opening, to the terror of elders who are all too quick to wring their hands about the dangers and immorality of the new ways. As many of those who institutionalized Marx's thought well demonstrated, the authoritarian's first play is to justify the virtuous revolution through an unquestionable and monolithic appeal to historical necessity.

With respect to Africa, it is thus useful to recall Breyten Breytenbach's call to discern and understand the values that independence and liberation have brought to the continent.<sup>11</sup> He asks: To whom does contemporary Africa really belong? Are Africans living in borrowed clothes? Is there a particularly African way of understanding and administering power? Is this essentially negative or potentially positive? How do colonialism, global realities, contemporary African politics, and

talk of an African Renaissance impact each other? Is there a specifically African notion of peace and coexistence? To what extent do contemporary African responses to conflict carry the marks of African traditional mechanisms for survival, development, and peaceful coexistence? And do African notions of peace offer positive incentives in the global quest for peace?

These are live questions. As Shamil Jeppie demonstrates in the chapter that opens this book, radical transformation is a slow, contested, and unpredictable process. Looking across the events that have defined the Afro-Arab Spring and the armed liberation struggles that have changed the sub-Saharan landscape, Jeppie discusses ways in which history both conditions and constrains the impulse for revolution. This may link northern and southern Africa at the same time that it creates questions about the appropriate means and ends of change.

Radical transformation is a slow and contested process. Political change in the wake of entrenched patterns of authoritarian rule frequently includes cycles of insurrection, reforms, implosions, tactics and countertactics, recalcitrance and repression. Countries clearly differ in the way they have dealt with the residue of colonialism, postcolonial reform, and the institution of democratic governance. Thus, as Don Foster observes in his chapter, there is little to be gained by collapsing the collective images of an Arab Spring and an African Renaissance. And yet, as Foster shows, the frustrating false starts that all too frequently haunt African political and economic transformation reveal a shared set of questions and dilemmas, many of which take the form of structural and attitudinal obstacles to transition.

## Thinking (Beyond) Transition

If it is to generate any meaningful answers, the question of Africa cannot reduce the continent to a single condition. It cannot presuppose a one-size-fits-all solution or lead to a teleology of development. The evident and widespread desire to begin again appears in the midst of diverse, dizzying, and often contradictory forms of change. Some African states are failing outright. Some are struggling to build peace, while their neighbors are funding the conflict at the same time that they are wrestling with their own question of how to sustain opposition to leaders who have either overstayed their welcome or undermined democracy's promise. Still others are in various states of transition—there are constitutions to be written, economies to be rebuilt, and deep divisions to be healed. And some are doing quite well, even as relative stability brings doubts about whether early twenty-first-century foreign investment amounts to a Faustian bargain and whether global trade is another name for a stacked deck.

It is no exaggeration to say that the South African transition remains something of a beacon. In 1994 it seemed to many that the pieces were being put together in

a way that made a coherent picture. On the edge of outright and likely endless civil war, the leaders of the struggle and government took a step back from the brink and began the protracted work of developing a vocabulary for negotiations. Trust was built—in fits and starts. A concrete plan to end apartheid emerged slowly. Power was devolved and reconstructed in an interim constitution that opened the door to democratic elections and paved the way for a process of reconciliation that included conditional amnesty for perpetrators, a victim-centered attempt to come to terms with the past, and the possibility of reparation. Altogether, it was an innovative, appealing, and seemingly tidy package.

In his account of South Africa's settlement, Charles Villa-Vicencio wonders whether it was perhaps too tidy. On his reading, many involved in the settlement overlooked the fundamental limits of the South African transition in order to reach a settlement that benefited some to the neglect of others. For their part, critics of the settlement did not always care to look at both sides of the coin or offer anything more than a fantasy about how the end of apartheid might have unfolded otherwise. Looking in between with a sense of historical detail frequently missing from discussions of South Africa, Villa-Vicencio suggests South Africa's settlement is less a model than a cogent perspective for asking questions about the scope, mechanics, and ends of political and economic transitions in deeply divided countries across Africa. It is precisely this problem of division and repair that focuses Helen Scanlon's chapter and its concern for the costs that attend the increasingly mandatory truth-telling processes that are thought to promote healing and speed transformation. Focusing on South Africa's TRC, Scanlon details the gendered nature of deep division and points to the ways in which widespread norms of transitional justice in Africa do not assure "gender-inclusive" reconciliation.

While the last word on the South African transition has yet to be written, one of its decisive lessons is that the end of a transition—a moment which is itself difficult to locate—is the beginning of arduous labor. Democratic constitutions are works in progress, all the more so when they delineate socioeconomic rights that do not concede the finitude of available resources. Set into economies in which rapid transformation may well be another word for collapse, the resulting tension produces justifiable frustration and increasingly angry charges of corruption, where the latter not infrequently rests on the naive belief that a constitution can speak to and redress all contingencies—past, present, and future. This does not deny that those who oversee new governing institutions frequently succumb to actual corruption, a crime that takes many forms and comes with the added symbolic weight of underscoring the divide between powerful and powerless, rich and poor, represented and excluded. This weight does have a tipping point, even as the appeal of such a fulcrum too often serves as a way to energize and rationalize a populism that simply replaces one kind of corruption with another. More than one thing hangs in the balance. And the balance is not ready-made.

The Arab Spring reaches across the physical and psychological reality of the Suez Canal that divides the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa. Across this expanse, it has demonstrated the extent to which people are prepared to go in pursuit of fundamental reform. The self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in Sidi Bouzid, the occupation of Tahrir Square in Cairo, and the events culminating in the killing of Muammar Qaddafi in Sirte are in one sense new struggles but in another sense a culmination of earlier struggles in these countries and elsewhere. In this respect, the eruptions were not random. They drew specifically on history, not least as they looked back to the ancient Islamic empires and the imposition of the infamous Sykes-Picot Agreement that divided Arab states in the Middle East between the French and the English at the conclusion of World War I.<sup>12</sup>

That delegations from Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya each visited South Africa after the removal of the respective country's long-time authoritarian leader—President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, and Muammar Qaddafi in Libya—is significant. Its limitations aside, the South African political compromise was seen as having possible *procedural* implications for transitional justice developments in these countries. Against this backdrop Ibrahim Sharqieh's chapter turns to the Tunisian case and reflects on the "laudable progress" that has been made in Tunisia's framework for transitional justice. In contrast to Libya, the country's constituent assembly has not insisted on purging all elements of the previous regime, a decision that has enhanced the possibilities of political dialogue. With respect to Libya, Asif Majid's chapter considers the historical and contemporary tensions that have appeared since the end of the Qaddafi regime. Noting the high level of political-cultural division, the inability of Libya's fragile central government to disarm warlords and militias, and low levels of political inclusion, Majid finds that the current Libyan state is characterized by a power vacuum that both complicates the path of transition and inhibits reconciliation. Emphasizing concerns that reach to the heart of *substantial* political transition, the assessments offered by Sharqieh and Majid suggest that one lesson of the Afro-Arab Spring for postapartheid South Africa is that poor and alienated communities cannot be excluded from the benefits of a political settlement. This is a lesson that has not gone unheeded in South Africa, where critics of government policy warn of South Africa's pending "Tunisia Day" of resistance and point to the lesson of post-Qaddafi Libya: Nation building in deeply divided societies needs to include minority and regionally estranged communities.<sup>13</sup>

## Fault Lines—North and South

The complex dynamics and dilemmas of Africa's transitions shed light on Thabo Mbeki's decision to promote and pursue an African Renaissance at a moment

when the South African miracle was front and center. At a point when the country, the continent, and the world were paying far more attention to the possibilities of reconciliation and the work of the TRC, Mbeki spent some of South Africa's political capital to promote a vision for the continent that led critics to ask whether he was doing so to divert attention away from the economic failings of the South African settlement. That said, from Mbeki's perspective, South Africa's transition could set the stage for an African Renaissance—the next logical and necessary step in consolidating South Africa's turn away from its apartheid past—and promote the possibility of democratic transition in other African countries.

When authoritarian regimes in the Arab world and in Africa are faced with the possibility of losing power and access to material wealth, they have proven themselves adept at crushing pro-democratic movements in the name of promoting both political stability and democracy. The “deep state” in Egyptian politics has worked this option with efficiency. In his chapter Ebrahim Rasool argues that, in his endeavor to lead the Muslim Brotherhood and secularists into political coexistence, President Mohamed Morsi fell victim to the extremists in the Muslim Brotherhood as well as to the manipulative forces of the deep state. This opened the way for General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, the Egyptian chief of the army, to lead the coup d'état that overthrew Morsi's democratically elected government and to ban the Muslim Brotherhood, yet to be heralded as the defender of democracy by a coalition of business, military, and political leaders.

The developments that have led to the current Egyptian impasse have roots that reach deep into a history of dissent.<sup>14</sup> Against overt and subtle forms of Orientalism, the larger Arab Spring demonstrates that citizens are neither passive nor backward in responding to caliphs and political leaders in Muslim-majority countries<sup>15</sup> Consider just a few moments of uprising, revolt, and revolution: the Iranian revolution in 1979; the overthrow of the military-led government of President Gaafar Numeiri in Sudan in 1985 by students, workers, and professionals; the Islamic occupation of poor urban quarters in Cairo in 1992; the Palestinian intifadas of 1987 and 2000; uprisings in Yemen in protest against the invasion of Iraq by the United States in 2003; the Lebanese Cedar Revolution in 2005, which led to the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon; the Egyptian April 6 Movement that in 2008 mobilized Egyptians to show solidarity with textile workers on strike in El-Mahalla El-Kubra; and prodemocracy rallies in Yemen and Iran, as well as campaigns of civil resistance in Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and other Gulf States.

With something of this history in mind, the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, along with the popular demonstrations that swept across the Arab world in 2011, was read by many analysts and leaders in the West as a sign of emerging peace and democracy in the Middle East. The prediction was premature, not least as the endgame of the Arab Spring has yet to unfold. Thus, the evident

interplay of historical, economic, political, religious, and cultural factors that constitute the shifting bedrock of the uprisings in the Arab Spring has spurred a growing literature dedicated to explaining the dynamics of the uprisings and the persistence of authoritarianism. This work shows some of the ways in which the Arab Spring is shaped and complicated by deep-seated frustration with material and nonmaterial deprivation, new forms of communication, meddling by external geopolitical groups, and the need to forge coalitions across entrenched divisions. Tunisia has found common ground in the creation of a constitution, Libya has to date failed to find political consensus for constitutional government, and Egypt has crushed what was a brave democratic endeavor. The futures of countries of the Maghreb, the Sahel, and further south balance on a knife edge. The demise of Afro-Arab authoritarianism hangs in the balance. The struggle for democracy and human rights is not done. Arguably, it has entered a new and more intense phase.

The realities of cultural, religious, and tribal divisions, fueled by demands for resources, are tearing at the seams of several African states. This is evident in South Sudan and the Central African Republic. Looking to Nigeria, scholars of Islam and organizations across the continent have condemned the atrocities of Boko Haram as a blatant misuse of Islamic teachings in the name of political extremism.<sup>16</sup> At the same time it is important to recognize that the situation has roots in the estrangement of Muslims in the north that can be traced back to the amalgamation of the northern and southern British protectorates to form the consolidated Colony of Nigeria in 1914 and the independent state of Nigeria in 1960. The merger resulted in the alienation of the mainly Muslim Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups in the north from the Yoruba and Igbo groups in the south, who are mainly Christians or adherents of African traditional religion. It also entrenched political and economic power largely in the south, a consolidation that was aggravated by the imposition of Western education as a vehicle for evangelism in the north. Tensions have also reemerged between the government of Mali and Tuareg Islamic separatists in the northern part of the country. Prime Minister Moussa Mara has stated that his government is “at war” with the separatists and called for international support to crush the uprising.<sup>17</sup>

Intense conflict and violence inside oppressive states develop in different directions. The state can fall apart as in Somalia, Lebanon, Yugoslavia, and Syria. Alternatively, conflict may hold an opportunity for historically entrenched enemies to collectively address the problems that have brought a nation to the brink of collapse. Despite the failure of the postapartheid state to grasp the opportunities with the political creativity needed, the historic South African settlement provided an example of what can be achieved, at least procedurally, in a deeply divided society. It provided a space within which the country was given the opportunity to begin again.

Each country and region has its own unique challenges. The Arab Spring cannot be reduced to a religious-secular conflict. Middle East and North African countries are nevertheless significantly shaped by the influence of Islamic political theology. In his chapter Ebrahim Moosa provides a detailed analysis of the political theology underlying the Arab Spring, primarily as it played out in Egypt. Moosa points out that the absence of a political theology consonant with democracy and the nation-state has created a theological Babel tower in Muslim politics. He identifies the roots of this battle in the twentieth century and explains the tragedy of theological politics in Egypt when Morsi was deposed and the military reinstalled. It remains to be seen whether a theological paradigm shift in Islam could underwrite democratic inclusivity in Muslim state building. His main argument is that calls for a nonauthoritarian political theology made a century ago have gone totally unheeded by religious and political elites.

In the chapter that follows, Abdulkader Tayob takes up the tension between religion and secularism in light of the fact that “the relationship between religion, nation, and state is far from settled in postapartheid South Africa.” Concerned partly with the promise and limits of South Africa’s tradition, Tayob’s reflection sheds important light on the question of how societies can open spaces to stage the interplay between constitutional order and faith-based pluralism.

Katherine Marshall, in turn, provides a discerning analysis of the “complex gender dynamics in North Africa” and how questions of gender have been included in and excluded from the dynamics of the Arab Spring. Looking at the nexus of cultural-religious practice and human rights, Marshall’s chapter contends that while “gender equality, at least on the surface and in formal policy statements and constitutions, has long been officially accepted as a norm across the region,” current reforms have yet to transform “the deeply patriarchal nature of Arab politics and society.”

## A Change of Season?

Between 1963 and 2002, there were some two hundred attempted and actual coups d’état in Africa. Many resulted in a significant number of deaths. Very few advanced the cause of democracy. And, for the most part, these events went unchecked. Founded on a principle of “non-interference in the internal affairs of [member] states,” the Organization of African Unity had neither the inclination nor the leverage to oppose military forces intent on overthrowing standing though sometimes corrupt governments. This presumption began to change in 2002 with the formation of the African Union (AU) and its expressed commitment to actively oppose “unconstitutional change of government” in member states.

Focused on development, democratization, economic growth, and peace and security across the continent, the AU was grounded in a concern to promote good

governance and collective security through such mechanisms as the AU Peace and Security Council, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). It has also committed to an African criminal court, a body that will operate parallel to the International Criminal Court (ICC). With these mechanisms, the AU has taken concrete steps to advance democratization and development. It has, for instance, used NEPAD and the APRM to shape economic policy and encourage political accountability. It has also variously suspended the AU memberships of Mauritania, Guinea, Niger, Madagascar, Côte d'Ivoire, and Mali for what it saw as the unjustified removal of democratically elected governments.<sup>18</sup>

The African Union remains a work in progress, a promise of continental stability and development that is hampered by political, economic, and institutional constraints, including inconsistent buy-in from member states, deep historical division and economic scarcity, conflicting demands from international monetary institutions, an organizational structure that provokes infighting, inadequate financial resources, and a limited capacity to take retributive action against non-compliant states or to resist the intervention of global powers. In this light Chris Landsberg's carefully argued chapter considers the gap between the AU's promise and its power in relation to the ongoing struggle to define and enable a new Pan-Africanism. As Landsberg notes, the difficulties are not simply with the AU itself: "The early hopes of the Arab Spring and the African Renaissance simply cannot be realized without AU promises being implemented by member states, across Africa, from north to south." In a basic sense the possibility of Pan-Africanism may hinge on the emergence of a unity in difference, the capacity and willingness of individual countries to make concrete contributions to the "formation of common institutions and the promotion of cosmopolitan values."

How will Africa begin again? How might the parts come together to compose the whole? How might the whole gather and support the parts? Central to the debate over the future of the African Union, these questions reach to the very heart of the African Renaissance. As the call for a renaissance holds out the question of Africa, Erik Doxtader's chapter considers the potentially productive dilemmas that attend an African appeal to the European concept of a renaissance and then contends that an African rebirth may depend on more than policymaking. In the name of making Africa anew, Doxtader suggests that the long-standing idea of an African renaissance is rooted in the discovery of a shared concern for language and the invention of a vocabulary with a constitutive power, a power of self-definition held in common by all of those who would profess "I am an African."

Spring is a fragile season. It can be delayed by a hard winter and preempted by a fiery summer. There is little easy about opening and then sustaining a moment of regeneration. And yet, for all the contingency of spring, for all the ways in which its promise may not arrive at the expected moment, its anticipation

and appearance are nevertheless felt. A turn unfolds, even as its terms and implications are not yet entirely visible. There is a turn in the making. In the movements of the African Renaissance and the Afro-Arab Spring, the question of Africa is open. Individually and together, the essays that follow afford an opening into this space, a chance to think and reflect on what remains to be seen and what might unfold otherwise—for Africa.

## Notes

1. Here, “Afro-Arab Spring” is used to highlight our concern for the African continent. In the chapters that follow the more inclusive “Arab Spring” is frequently employed to portray the broader nexus between African, Middle Eastern, and Gulf State Arab countries.

2. Thabo Mbeki, “Address by Executive Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, to Corporate Council on Africa’s ‘Attracting Capital to Africa’ Summit,” April 19, 1997, [www.sahistory.org.za/archive/address-executive-deputy-president-thabo-mbeki-corporate-council-africas-attracting-capital-](http://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/address-executive-deputy-president-thabo-mbeki-corporate-council-africas-attracting-capital-).

3. Kim Wale, *Confronting Exclusion: Time for Radical Reconciliation—South African Reconciliation Barometer Survey: 2013 Report* (Cape Town: Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, 2014).

4. Garth le Pere, “A Revolution Betrayed?,” *The Thinker* 50 (2013): 9.

5. At a symposium on identity organized by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, Cape Town, October 2003. See Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Walk with Us and Listen: Political Reconciliation in Africa* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 116.

6. To this, one can grasp the way in which colonization saw an influx of Europeans into Africa—with some settlers (in time) becoming natives. See Mahmood Mamdani, “Beyond Settler and Native as Political Identities: Overcoming the Political Legacy of Colonialism,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 42, no. 4 (2001): 651–64.

7. G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 173, 190.

8. Hillary Rodham Clinton, “The United States—South Africa Partnership: Going Global,” remarks at the University of Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa, August 8, 2012, [www.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2012/08/196184.htm](http://www.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2012/08/196184.htm).

9. Ali A. Mazrui, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1986), 14.

10. Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (London: International, 1994); also available at [www.slp.org/pdf/marx/eighteenth\\_brum.pdf](http://www.slp.org/pdf/marx/eighteenth_brum.pdf).

11. Breyten Breytenbach, “Imagine Africa,” paper delivered at the Vitalizing African Cultural Assets Conference, Gorée Island, March 5–7, 2007.

12. Eric Chaney, “Democratic Change in the Arab World, Past and Present,” *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, Spring 2012, [www.stanford.edu/dept/islamic\\_studies/cgi-bin/web/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/chaney.pdf](http://www.stanford.edu/dept/islamic_studies/cgi-bin/web/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/chaney.pdf).

13. Moeletsi Mbeki, “South Africa: Only a Matter of Time before the Bomb Explodes,” *Leader*, February, 12, 2011, [www.leader.co.za/article.aspx?s=23&f=1&a=2571](http://www.leader.co.za/article.aspx?s=23&f=1&a=2571).

14. Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprisings* (London: Verso, 2012); Asef Bayet, *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2007).

15. Yacoob Abba Omar, “The Uprisings,” *The Thinker* 59 (2014): 40–44.