



**READING REVOLUTION INTO REVOLT:
CAUTIONARY NOTES ON NORTH AFRICA**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

It is only normal, even natural, that as the people of Tunisia and Egypt rose up in righteous rebellion, we would rejoice at their rising, reaffirming the essentiality and urgency of their resistance, and standing in steadfast solidarity with them as they wage these heroic and historic struggles. And it is likewise to be expected that, caught up in the uplifting moment and meaning of the movement, we would tend to interpret their actions in the most expansive terms, reading achieved revolution into a still-unfolding revolt.

This we feel and do first because we realize these struggles are unfolding in Africa and are part of a continent-wide struggle of African peoples for freedom, justice, security, well-being and participatory, representative and responsive governance. Also, as pan-Africanists, we see these struggles as essential to breaking the back of neo-colonial domination and dependence and moving the African continent forward toward the long-sought goals of unity, self-determination and development in the clear and uncompromising interests of its people.

Moreover, seeing the sign “I Have a Dream” and similar ones in Tunisia and witnessing the call for “A Million Man March” in Egypt reminds us of the special instructive, inspiring and transformative role we, as an oppressed, struggling and freedom-cherishing people have played and must continue to play in the unfolding history of the world. And as Malcolm taught us, we must play this role, not as mindless assistants and servants of American empire, but rather as self-conscious soldiers and allies in the rightful global rebellion against oppression, exploitation and injustice in the world.

Finally, as Fanon teaches us, we see it as a moral obligation to sanction and support all struggles of the oppressed for liberation and

the good, decent and dignity-affirming life all humans desire and deserve. And thus, we, like all others in the world who still embrace and engage in the struggle for good in the world as a moral imperative, are uplifted and reaffirmed every time we witness even a small struggle. For we know, as Malcolm taught and told us, it could be that spark that ignites a forest fire that joined to others cleanses the world in a righteous, just and promising way.

Clearly, then, we do and must stand in steadfast solidarity with these heroic people and all oppressed and struggling people, but there are some cautionary notes we need to write down, regularly read and always remember. First and foremost, the source and center, author and ultimate arbiter of revolt and revolution are the people themselves. It is they who initiate it, whether revolution or revolt, who carry it to a decisive victory and guard it against wrongful reinterpretation, reversal or the tendency to become exhausted and enticed to settle for less. And so, we give them praise and pay rightful homage to the martyrs who are a mirror and model of the commitment and ultimate sacrifice the liberation struggle asks us to be ready to embrace and make.

Given the awesome cost, casualties and heavy burdens that are bound to come with any serious liberation struggle, it is important in this age of excessive and misleading assumptions about the power of personal informational technology that we not go along with the illusion that this kind of technology is the source of the people’s rebellion and resistance. It is the people of Tunisia and Egypt from whom the idea and energy of resistance emerged and expressed itself. It is they who suffered and sacrificed, were killed or wounded, rundown, trampled, detained, tortured, firebombed and assaulted by thugs,

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regular and secret police, and those in the intelligence service.

This too is a lesson worth noting: it is true the revolution will not only not be televised, it will not be formed, fought or won on Facebook, Google, YouTube, Twitter or any of their fellow cyberspace travellers. It cannot be televised or tweeted because revolution is not an event, but a process, not a spectacle to be televised, but an ongoing task to be completed, a persistent radical practice of a people to free itself, secure the material ground for its well-being and the social and ethical ground for its flourishing. Therefore, even though the removal of a dictator is essential, it is not the broad, deep rooted, far-reaching and systemic change revolution requires.

It is said that the technology puts the people in struggle, in touch with the outside world, but to what real and realizable purpose? Clearly, it is advantageous to break beyond the walls the occupier and oppressor builds around you, to tell your story to the world and win allies. But the lessons of Haiti, Congo, Palestine and other sites of brutal oppression prove that even people who know are often silent and insensitive, and even sanction a favored oppressor's action against the oppressed. There is clearly a selective morality here, one that has the audacity to attempt to give the oppressor equal or even superior status to the oppressed, contradicting every sacred text worthy of the name.

This is why we must make a distinction between allies in struggle and episodic and passive watchers searching for signs of

themselves, of their technological innovations, ideas and cultural trappings and claiming to have sparked a revolution. Already, the international spectators have folded their Facebook and Twitter tents in Tunisia and will no doubt soon tire of Egypt's efforts to free itself, not just from the dictator, but also from the personnel and structural remnants of his reign, including the police, intelligence services and the army. And they will also almost surely pull back from the critique of and resistance to the U.S. and Israeli deep involvement in the Mubarak regime's corruption, coercion, rendition, selling off of financial services and natural resources of the country, and suppression of the Egyptian people's continuing commitment to the Palestine liberation struggle.

So the untelevised revolution must and will continue and instead of the talk of the personal technology of watching and wording, there will be a need to discuss and deal decisively with the technology of suppression: the spy satellites, drones, helicopters, tanks, armored cars, smart bombs, jet planes, prisons and all the other devices of death used by both the oppressive elites and their imperial suppliers and handlers. As Fanon noted, "the struggle for national liberation does not consist in spanning the gap at one stride, the drama has to be played out in all its difficulty every day." Thus, a revolutionary structure and practice must be created, grounded and sustained in the daily lives of the people and there is no quick or mechanical way to accomplish or avoid this.

Dr. Maulana Karenga, Professor of Africana Studies, California State University-Long Beach; Executive Director, African American Cultural Center (Us); Creator of Kwanzaa; and author of *Kwanzaa: A Celebration of Family, Community and Culture* and *Introduction to Black Studies*, 4th Edition, www.MaulanaKarenga.org.