Neoliberal Globalisation and the "Arab Spring"; One Facet of a Global Movement?

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"Everything we hear is an opinion, not a fact. Everything we see is a perspective, not the truth."

– Marcus Aurelius.

Introduction

The majority of established academic theories failed to predict or explain the "Arab Spring", an event widely regarded as having been 'missed' by the majority of Middle-Eastern specialists.[1] Since then, many of the same mainstream commentators have consistently neglected the global dimension to the Arab uprisings, preferring instead to emphasise internal political legacies as the root of the crisis. This work seeks to expose these views as misconceptions, to show that the "Arab Spring" in fact has its structural roots in the *global* transformations of the past three decades, and to attempt to locate its emergence within the context of an incipient transnational movement. It will be argued that the "Arab Spring" was not an uprising in isolation, but was structurally interlinked with the other contemporary social movements that define this period.

Crucial to this is the establishment of an alternative conceptual framework that gives new perspective and offers fresh analytical insight into the nature of the global-system. Chapter One therefore provides a historical overview and critique of neoliberalism, and its differential global application. The perspective of a group of thinkers who draw upon the insights of Marx, and of Gramsci in particular, are employed to construct an alternative theory of the global system which challenges the increasingly irrelevant state-centric model.[2] Such a theoretical approach is not without its limitations; to a degree, it sacrifices detail in the interests of a more encompassing analysis, yet through this process enables unique insight into the events of 2011 that would not be possible within a state-centric framework.

Attempting to see conventionally-interpreted historical events from a radical standpoint gives both the potential for great insight, and for misinterpretation. Whilst the limitations of employing such a conceptual apparatus are discussed, the theory is vindicated throughout this work in the sense that it consistently reflects the empirical reality of the global system. Additionally, an analysis should not be undertaken purely because of its perceived easiness, wealth of easily-accessible evidence or even potential academic-receptiveness. If the subject is considered worthy, such difficulties should be clearly acknowledged whilst at the same creatively worked-around in order to glean what insights can be found and thus contribute towards a more rounded spectrum of understanding. Radical views are important in expanding the frontiers of the possible.

Chapter Two explores how the crisis of the Arab world was fundamentally of socioeconomic origin, through a focus on regional aspects. This is tracked in relation to the emergence of neoliberal modes of governance in the region, in particular highlighting the marginalisation of middle-class fragments and the erosion of social security as critical factors in the uprisings. Chapter Three subsequently examines the linkages between this socioeconomic problematic and the *global* transformations of the neoliberal era, exploring the extent to which transnational economic forces have shaped the region and played a role in precipitating the uprisings. At this point it should be acknowledged that the

Arab analysis will focus upon Egypt. Egypt is central to the region politically, culturally and in terms of its demographic. Representative of regional dynamics, it has been described as a 'microcosm' of the Arab Spring.[3] As Samir Amin established, Egypt was the first country in the region to emerge from the periphery of global capitalism and is 'easily recognised as playing and having always played a major role in the general evolution of its region'.[4] Thus, Egypt was the first to bring about 'Arab Socialism' and the original source of Arab economic liberalisation. However, Egypt is not the exclusive focus, and a comparative analysis with the other Arab states is included, both in support of the claim of Egypt as regional trendsetter, and to give depth and credence to the argument that there is an underlying structural root to the uprisings.

The final two chapters explore the extent to which the "Arab Spring" can be seen in conjunction with contemporary social movements as one facet of an incipient *global* movement that arose predominantly in reaction to the perceived failure of the neoliberal model of economic development. Building upon the global links identified with regard to the Arab region in Chapter Three, Chapter Four investigates structural similarities between the other contemporary movements of the period, by relating them to the global transformations of the neoliberal era. The final chapter then interrogates the extent to which transnational linkages have been cultivated between the movements. Comparatively, the focus is limited to the Israeli 'movement for social justice', Occupy movement and the *Indignado* movements in Greece and Spain. This is due to geographical range, access to relevant material and constraints on the word limit. However, there are a range of other contemporary movements that could also have formed part of the analysis. The protests in Chile, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Portugal, Iceland, UK, India, Mexico, and Russia all emerged during this period and are relevant to this study.

This work focuses to a large extent on how systemic pressures related to the ideological preponderance of neoliberalism underpin the Arab uprisings and associated contemporary movements. Thus, the bulk of primary source material comes from the neoliberal proponents. Most heavily utilised are documents from the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), including reports and political announcements. National sources, such as presidential speeches and nationally-orientated international institutions have also been used. Wikileaks sources also proved to be useful in an analysis of events that are so recent, where many official documents remain private. Use of international databases, in particular the UN and the ILO provided the bulk of the statistical evidence that bridges the theory espoused in the first chapter with the socioeconomic realities explored in the following chapters.

The comparative analysis between the "Arab Spring" and three other contemporary social movements proved the most difficult in the obtainment of primary source material. This is principally due to the fact that the very nature of these decentralised movements makes them "informal" in the sense that they are detached from institutionalised politics. As such there is an absence of formal documentation. However, this problem has been at least partially overcome through use of contemporary accounts by journalists and activists, analyses of slogans and phrases, and by exploring an increasing body of demographic and statistical research related to the movements' structural origins.

There are also a number of significant secondary sources. A class-based interpretation of the global-system and critique of the neoliberal strand of capitalism in particular, is expounded principally through the formative work of David Harvey and a group of innovative neo-Gramscian thinkers, who collectively provide an important contextual and theoretical framework which has made the comparative element of this work possible. With regard to the socioeconomic roots of the Arab crisis, the comprehensive work of both Achcar and Bogaert were especially important. Whilst an array of sources were used in the comparative section of this work, Della Porta's work on transnational activism was instrumental in providing a foundation from which an analysis of the interactions between the movements could be made.

Overall therefore, the movements of 2011 were ultimately motivated by a multiplicity of grievances, yet intersecting a significant proportion of these demands was an underlying socioeconomic problematic related to the structural transformations that had occurred with the emergence of neoliberalism as a global phenomenon from the 1970s. Furthermore, 2011 can be identified as a significant historical juncture that witnessed the emergence of a qualitatively new embryonic form of transnational protest, principally orientated around a rejection of the global preponderance of neoliberalism.

Through the historical context of neoliberal globalisation and a critique of its ostensibly deleterious effects, and by employing a neo-Grasmcian conceptual framework, an analytical interpretation can be constructed that views the "Arab Spring" as one facet of a wider transnational movement orientated against neoliberal globalization.

CHAPTER ONE: The Conceptual Framework

Following a general critique of neoliberalism, this chapter seeks to construct an alternative theoretical perspective on the nature of the global system, in recognition that established state-centric models are increasingly irrelevant. It is argued that such a conceptual framework is more reflective of the realities of the contemporary world-system, and can enable a fresh interpretation of the events of 2011 to be made.

David Harvey has compiled one of the most cogent and ubiquitous set of works on the subject of neoliberalism and defines neoliberalism as 'a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.'[5] Historically, its central elements have been 'deregulation, privatisation, and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision'.[6]

Conversely, neoliberalism's antecedent era of 'embedded liberalism' in the 1950s and 1960s was defined by Keynesian monetarist policies and a 'class compromise' between capital and labour in which the forces of the market were 'surrounded by a web of social and political constraints', with a significant role for the state in the economy.[7] Following the 'stagflation' and economic downturn of the 1970s, this model fell into disrepute, with the utility of the welfare state in particular coming under heavy criticism. The result has been an erosion of what Polanyi famously termed the 'principle of social protection', through a restructuring of labour-relations.[8] This deterioration of social protection, coupled with the fact that the 'trickle-down effect' supposed to occur under the purportedly more efficient neoliberal model has not been realised meant that increasing social polarisation and economic inequality had become a global trend.[9]

Whilst neoliberalism's intellectual roots date back to Hayek and a group of Austrian intellectuals from the late 1940s, it wasn't established as a historical current of global significance until the 1970s and 1980s, when Thatcher and Reagan came to power. The end of the Cold War and the 'death of socialism' cemented neoliberalism as the preponderant global ideology. From the 1990s, neoliberalism's internationalisation became further reified through the 'Washington Consensus', as privatisation and market deregulation became the fundamental development strategy of the IFI's, 'releasing' the global market, but also dramatically heightening global inequities and facilitating the rise of oligarchical 'crony capitalist' modes of governance.[10]

Neoliberalism has therefore become 'the new normalcy' in the face of a conspicuous absence of any alternative ideology of a global magnitude.[11] Harvey argues that neoliberalism's predominance goes beyond its unparalleled global application, in that it has become 'hegemonic as a mode of discourse'; no longer discernable by most as an ideology, but instead erroneously ingrained in popular consciousness as a kind of common-sense.[12] Thus, the ideological ascension of neoliberalism precipitated the development of a profound socioeconomic structural transformation of global magnitude, resulting in 'extraordinary concentrations of wealth and power emerging all over the place'.[13]

Whilst proponents of neoliberal economic theory tend to portray their ideas in quasi-scientific terms, emphasising economic 'efficiency' and 'objective logic', the contention that neoliberalism is more than simply a free-market economic model, but explicitly represents a class-based political project has been posited by a number of commentators. Apeldoorn and Overbeek define neoliberalism as 'a political project aimed to restore capitalist class power in the aftermath of the economic and social crises of the 1970s'.[14] Empirical analyses of the persistent structural features of economic and social polarisation show them to be intrinsic to the process of neoliberalism

globalisation, and are, according to Harvey, sufficient to define it as 'a project to achieve the restoration of class power'.[15] In such a view, the core tenets of neoliberalism, especially privatisation and market deregulation, are seen principally as methods for the upward-redistribution of wealth. As the eminent economist Ha-Joon Chang put it; 'Once you realize that trickle-down economics does not work, you will see the excessive tax cuts for the rich as what they are – a simple upward redistribution of income, rather than a way to make all of us richer, as we were told.'[16] Thus, the current phase of economic globalisation has been aptly described as 'oligopolistic neo-liberalism' as an explanation of the recurrent protection of the economically strong through a socialization of their risks, and an unregulated exposure to market discipline for the economically weak.[17]

Clearly, 'globalisation' is a complex, multifaceted process involving an integrated, kaleidoscopic array of different sociocultural trajectories, yet as Sklair persuasively argues, the 'dominant, actually-existing type' that underpins the basic process is that of capitalist globalisation.[18] A salient example of this is how advancements in infrastructure and technology, often pointed to as driving the process of globalisation, have principally been developed for, and are engaged with, facilitating the globalisation of capital.[19] Critically, the historical configuration of capital changed after the 1970s in a way in which the scale of operation of industrial capital was no longer nationally-fixed, but became global.[20] By defining globalisation as driven primarily by the expanding accumulation of capital, in which the interests of global capital tend to supersede the social needs of local populations, the events of 2011 cannot be subject to purely endogenous analyses, but must be located within the global context.

Central to this changing configuration of power is the decline of the state relative to that of non-state actors, particularly emergent transnational and supranational bodies. The state of the 1950s and 1960s has been described as a 'force field that internalised class relations'.[21] In contrast, the diminished role of the neoliberal state is oriented around facilitating the unobstructed flow of (transnational) capital. Subsequently, the state is increasingly 'judged in terms of its comparative hospitality to foreign capital', not on its ability to best serve its general population.[22] The clear implications for state sovereignty that these changes have brought have led some scholars to define the structural transformations to the global system as a 'transnational neo-liberal revolution'.[23] Whilst in neoliberal theory the state is not supposed to be interventionist, paradoxically the power of (largely undemocratic) institutions, such as the IMF or the Federal Reserve, has been expanded to make decisions of global importance.[24] As political scientist Benjamin Barber proposed; 'governmental paralysis in the US, Italy, Spain and the countries of the Arab Spring is more than a matter of the moment but suggestive of decrepitude … the nation-state is fast becoming obsolete'.[25]

One niche group of thinkers, drawing upon the theoretical insights of Marxian scholars, and of Gramsci in particular, have interpreted and explained the process of neoliberal globalisation in an innovative theory that proposes that the global system can most accurately be defined in terms of an emerging *transnational* hegemony. In contrast to the conventional state-centric view, in which states are the dominant actors in an *inter*-national system, this neo-Gramscian approach argues that the *global* system is principally organised in terms of the politico-economic hegemony of a transnational capitalist class (TCC). [26]

The state-centric view is charged with neglecting the increasing propensity for 'transnational social forces' to shape global political dynamics and thus obfuscating the reality of the global system.[27] These scholars conversely define the structure of the global-system in terms of the process of the accumulation of capital, and the agency of the social forces at play that originate primarily from the relations of production and the struggle over the direction of accumulation.[28] Thus, this perspective builds upon the idea that 'neoliberalism is the fundamental expression of the outlook of transnational circulating capital'.[29] The socioeconomic transformations of the neoliberal era are conceptualised through an analysis of the way in which states have increasingly become 'captured' by dominant groups who are transnationally-orientated and seek integration into 'emergent global capitalist structures'.[30]

According to Sklair, the TCC comprises four elements; owners and local affiliates of major corporations, 'globalising bureaucrats and politicians', 'globalising professionals' and 'consumerist elites'.[31] The growth and consolidation of this TCC has been advanced through technological improvements in transport and communications, and the growth of international institutions that facilitate dialogue between these class fractions, leading to 'a transnational identity and shared consciousness which fosters a closer identification of interests'.[32] The increasingly salient role played

by transnational corporations, IFIs and supranational institutions has been interpreted as a rudimentary 'transnational, quasi-state infrastructure' that forms a platform for an inchoate transnational capitalist class (TCC).[33] The conceptual framework constructed by Robinson, Sklair and others concerning a transformed global system and the hegemony of a TCC has become increasingly reflective of the contemporary realities of the global system, and through its application can yield fresh insight into the nature of the Arab uprisings and its relationship to the other movements witnessed in 2011.

A transnational approach to IR therefore offers a fresh perspective unconstrained by the limits of a state-centric conceptual analysis. Yet there are limitations, as well as advantages, in utilising such a framework. The neo-Gramscian approach has most frequently been criticised for neglecting the role of the state in the global system.[34] Clearly, the state is still a powerful entity and an analysis of the interaction between states is necessary in any discussion that involves the global context. Yet this point of contention dissipates with an understanding that states and national societies can coexist within this framework; that their roles are still significant, but they are not solely identified as the overarching principle actors that direct the dynamics of the global system.

In fact, states are presented as being fundamentally intertwined with the inchoate emergence of a transnational hegemony. Apeldoorn showed that 'the transition from one hegemonic project to another … never entails a total rupture of previous structures at once', but instead is shaped by a convergence between the two.[35] This explains the differentiated application of neoliberal policy between countries and between regions, a fact that is evident in the comparison between global movements in the final chapter. Harvey talks of the 'uneven geographical development of neoliberalism', explaining its varied global application in terms of a complex array of interacting 'political forces, historical traditions, and existing institutional arrangements'[36] Similarly, Gill argues that 'there is neither stasis nor uniformity in capitalism'.[37] Capital has become *more* transnational, but remains significantly constrained by national forces, and a nascent global civil society. As such, instruments of the TCC such as the IFI's have strong national ties, whilst organisations such as the G8 can be seen as groupings of interventionist states who essentially act in the interests of Western capital. It is also apparent that capital clearly is not in a state of collusion, but in competition on a multiplicity of levels. Yet on a macro level it is labour relations that are the defining principle of the capitalist world economy, not the competing elements of capital itself.

Viewing the world-system in terms of the inchoate hegemony of a TCC enables the construction of a new framework from which to view the Arab uprisings in conjunction with the other major protests that surfaced around 2011. It enables the theorising of a *transnational* anti-systemic movement that arose in reaction to the *transnational* hegemony of a fragment of the capitalist class. The critique of neoliberal globalisation spearheaded by Harvey and others provides a contextual background from which an analysis of the historical socioeconomic roots of the Arab uprisings can be made. The neo-Gramscian perspective builds upon this analysis by allowing the Arab uprisings to be seen in comparison with, and as one facet of, a range of other interconnected movements that have arisen in systemic opposition to the deleterious social effects inherent to neoliberal globalisation.

CHAPTER TWO: The Underlying Socioeconomic Condition

Having diagnosed the neoliberal condition and established an alternative perspective of the global system, an investigation into the underlying features of the Arab crisis can be made. Focusing on the historical socioeconomic condition of the Arab world, this chapter locates the roots of the "Arab Spring" in the emergence and of neoliberal forms of governance in the region and its deleterious social ramifications.

The "Arab Spring" has revealed considerable gaps in mainstream Western perceptions and attitudes towards the region as a whole, and has indicated that the conceptual lens employed by such analysts is fallacious. As such, retrospective attempts to explain the "Arab Spring" through such mainstream currents has typically employed the same erroneous perspective that failed to identify the potential uprisings in the first place, and has resulted in a

distorted interpretation. Most obviously, an obsession with political regimes, in particular their more repressive and coercive elements, has dominated mainstream commentary. Critics attribute this to the West's 'Orientalist' conceptual lens, in which the MENA region is viewed within the narrative of a 'clash of civilisations', and more specifically within a 'West vs Islam' context. [38] Such a view neglects the underlying socioeconomic reality of the uprisings through its fixation on 'civilizational' struggles, and fails to locate the Arab crisis within the wider context of neoliberal globalisation.

Many mainstream analysts rushed to portray the Arab uprisings as a reaction to the immediate internal political context. According to Bogaert, such domestically-focused interpretations have obscured the significance of social and capitalist forces.[39] As Abdelrahman and Achcar have pointed out respectively, they also relied upon a false separation of the 'economic' from the 'political', and that 'despotism by itself… can barely be sufficient cause for the outbreak'.[40] An analysis of the historical roots of the Arab crisis and an examination of the character of the protest movements contradicts such a short-sighted and nebulous view by showing that the fundamental basis of discontent did not lie exclusively within the domestic politics of the region.

As well as a fixation on what Parker terms 'endogenous political legacies', various Western commentators have also erroneously over-emphasised the presence of a 'youth bulge', the role of the 'New Media' and the 'contagion effect' as central factors in the uprisings.[41] These factors clearly have an impact, but they are best defined as aggravating circumstances, not deterministic causes. The role of the 'New Media' has perhaps been the most salient example of an aggravating circumstance being mistaken for central factor. Undoubtedly the use of 'New Media' has affected the dynamics of the movements. Networks such as Al Jazeera have been credited with giving political opponents of the Arab regimes a platform to voice their discontent, whilst New Media such as Facebook and Twitter have enabled a different, horizontal logic to the way protest movements are organised, and have played a significant role in mediating transnational networks of support.[42] However, to define the Egyptian uprising, for example, as a 'Facebook revolution' is to simultaneously overestimate the impact of 'New Media', and neglect the origins of the protests. As one contemporary commentator put it, 'in 1968, before the word "globalisation" or the internet were even invented, there were student rebellions around the world.'[43] Similarly, the presence of a large body of disaffected youth was clearly a factor in the uprisings, but to present this demographic condition as the principle factor is to amputate the uprisings from their long history of socioeconomic struggle. The 'contagion effect', too, was clearly a factor, not just in the Arab region but in influencing other movements of this period, but as Achcar has shown, there has to be favourable structural conditions in order for this phenomenon to occur.[44]

Ultimately, the analytical shortcoming of mainstream Western perception regarding the Arab uprisings can be explained through a failure to locate the regional dynamics with the context of the global system. A macro exploration of the roots of socioeconomic discontent within the region that locates the uprisings within the context of *global* systemic unrest heralds important insight into the global repercussions of neoliberal globalisation as well as hinting at the fundamental contradictions inherent to the capitalist system itself.

It can be argued that the Arab uprisings that began in 2011 were rooted in the socioeconomic transformations that have occurred over the past three decades. An exploration of this historical transformation is fundamental to constructing a comprehensive analysis of the structural origins of the Arab crisis.

During the 1960s, and in line with the global trends outlined in Chapter One, most of the region's economies were 'dominated by the public sector in line with a state-led developmentalist perspective', but by the 1970s a period of liberalisation had begun.[45] Nasserist "socialism" in Egypt was the archetype that defined the regional dynamic, but in reality was better defined by Achcar as 'a peculiar form of state capitalism'.[46] The *infitah* policies of economic liberalisation that began under Sadat and continued under Mubarak eroded many of the social gains that had been made during this period. Social protection including, for example, free education and guaranteed public sector employment for graduates were aspects of the developmental-state model in countries such as Tunisia and Egypt that were subsequently abandoned during the period of liberalisation.[47] However, this is not to say that the implementation of economic liberalisation along neoliberal guidelines was uniform across the region. As previously shown, neoliberal globalisation is inherently a differentiated process. Syria, for example, was constrained by forces within the regime and in its major constituencies in retaining a significant role for the state in the country's economy,

which hampered and distorted the process of liberalisation.[48]

The transition between old and new modes of governance therefore entailed a unique convergence between the two in the Arab region, yet despite this variance, broadly speaking the regional consequence of this global shift was the emergence of 'authoritarian modalities of neoliberal government'.[49] This was an Arab world defined by the calamitous marriage between an overly bureaucratic form of state-capitalism and a dogmatic adherence to neoliberal economic policy.[50] Accordingly, the adoption of the neoliberal programme in the region was highly differentiated and riddled with Arab idiosyncrasies, but still displayed the persistent structural features of socioeconomic polarisation that had arisen almost ubiquitously with the application of neoliberal policy. Thus, the socioeconomic crisis of the Arab world that precipitated the events of 2011 is inseparably related to the structural transition towards neoliberal modalities of governance that occurred in the region from the 1970s onwards.

The socioeconomic problematic discernable in the region that arose out of this context is multifaceted and complex, but of critical importance is both the *perception* and objective reality of what Achcar terms the increasing economic 'precarity' of Arab life.[51] This 'precarity' is epitomised by deteriorating job security, increasing unemployment, and general social instability principally through the erosion of social protection provided by the state following neoliberal reforms, and is situated against a backdrop of highly visible inequality and general economic malaise. Most significantly, this socioeconomic condition has succeeded in marginalising key fractions of the middle-classes, many of which ultimately formed the backbone of the protest movements in Egypt and other Arab states.[52]

The escalating socioeconomic 'precarity' of the region was especially evident in the high rate of youth unemployment. According to the UN, the MENA region had the highest youth unemployment rates in the world, whilst an ILO report in 2010 showed that the rates had risen steadily and were expected to continue rising.[53] The MENA region had youth unemployment rates of 23.7% and 23.8% respectively, in comparison to an average 6% adult unemployment rate.[54] However, the real numbers could be much higher, as the statistics only reflect those actively seeking work. Der Speigel reported on the eve of the Egyptian revolution that 53.4% of the population across the region were younger than 24, of which nearly three-quarters were unemployed.[55] High rates of graduate unemployment were another distinguishing feature. Tunisia was emblematic of this regional trend; according to the Tunisian economist Jaballah, from 1984-1990 graduate unemployment was at an average of 5.3%, but by 2008-2010 it had soared to an average 21.6%.[56] The (graduate) youth 'factor' has clearly had an impact upon the region, and as will be discussed later, the presence of an educated, yet marginalised youth has shaped the dynamics of contemporary protest movements across the world.

High rates of poverty are another ostensibly distinguishing feature of the region. According to a World Bank report released in 2010, 17% of the MENA region's population were living on less than US$2 a day in 2005, and it was further estimated that following the 2008 financial crisis 2.6 million more people were to be in poverty by 2011.[57] However, high rates of poverty alone are not sufficient to explain the initial uprisings. Despite being relatively high, poverty in the MENA region was comparatively similar to or lower than other developing regions.[58] What is of critical importance, however, is the absence of social protection provided by the state within this context of this economic malaise. Conservative estimates outlined in a World Bank report in 2011 put the figures at 34%, 44.5% and 49.9% of people in Libya, Egypt and Tunisia respectively without any form of social insurance whatsoever; whilst out of the total population of all the Arab states around 97.8% of the unemployed did not receive any allocations from the state.[59] Achcar terms this condition the 'Bouazzizzi Syndrome'; in reference to the vulnerability of the famous icon's precarious situation as an impoverished street trader working outside of the formal economy as illustrative of the socioeconomic predicament of ordinary people across the region.[60]

The recent history of popular resistance in the Arab world is representative of the socioeconomic cleavages incurred through the traumatic transition from the state-developmentalist model to neoliberal authoritarian modes of governance. The historical experience of these protest movements provided a platform from which the uprisings in 2011 emerged from, and their history must not be amputated from the events of 2011. The Arab uprisings did not begin with Bouazzizi's self-immolation, but as the Tunisian activist Sghiri put it, it was 'the drop that made the cup run over'.[61]

At the neoliberal genesis of the region, and following the debt crisis, there were recurrent urban riots that formed a popular backlash against the incipient policies. Egypt, the regions original 'laboratory for neoliberalism', experienced riots in 1977 as a direct result of the neoliberal *infitah* policies.[62] Known as the 'bread riots', they were a reaction not only to cuts to food subsidies, but to subsidies across the board, which some commentators have seen as a harbinger of 2011.[63] Further protests in Morocco in 1981 and 1984, Tunisia in 1984, Algeria in 1988 and Jordan in 1989, to name only the major urban riots, were also related to the neoliberal transformation of the region.[64] From 1998 to 2008 over two million workers participated in 2,623 collective movements in Egypt alone, which according to Beinin, were 'propelled by locally generated grievances that have been produced by the acceleration of the neo-liberal transformation of Egypt'.[65] The cycles of protest have continued, and the 'Arab spring' must be seen within the context of these cycles. In particular, since 2004 and the ascendency of Nazif's 'neoliberal cabinet', these movements grew in intensity.[66] The protests in Mahalla by textile workers in Egypt in 2006 involved over 24,000 participants and ultimately culminated in a general strike in 2008 which saw workers across Egypt demanding an improved standard of living.[67] Some of the protests even went beyond the specific workers' demands and began questioning the World Bank and IMF driven privatisation programs, demonstrating an awareness of the wider international context.[68] Mahalla's significance has been pointed to by many Egyptian activists in foreshadowing the uprising of 2011.[69]

Many of the specific movements in Egypt since 2004 in particular have been reflective of the marginalisation of middle-class elements.[70] The demands of the protesters are typically presented in political terms, with recurrent themes of anti-corruption, regime-change, and free and fair elections. Yet implicit in these demands was 'the desire for greater social and economic justice'.[71] Central demands were related to the erosion of social security, including demands for free education, graduate employment, revival of the public sector, and a general redistribution of wealth – essentially reflecting a desire for the state to return to a more interventionist role played in the 1950s and 1960s.[72]

A historical analysis tracing the growth of the Arab protest movements thus fits the theoretical template that sees the uprisings as the ultimate consequence of socioeconomic transformations brought about by a deepening of the neoliberal trajectory in the region. Whilst these grievances are not totally new, they have traditionally been borne predominantly by the working-classes. A crucial repercussion of the deterioration of the socioeconomic condition has been to extend this marginalisation to new fractions of the middle-classes, destabilising the structure of Arab society and creating conditions that were ripe for uprising. Kandil pointed out that in the Egyptian instance, through an acceleration of neoliberal policies the regime effectively undermined the social basis of the very class it was meant to be benefiting.[73] Ultimately, it was these marginalised fragments of the middle class that became the revolutionary backbone of the uprising. Therefore, in relation to the Arab uprisings, the principle consequence of the acceleration of neoliberal policies, particularly since the 1990s, has been the alienation of key segments of the middle-classes that had traditionally been protected by the state. It is this new and relatively abrupt marginalisation of such middle-class fragments that ultimately precipitated the Arab uprisings.

CHAPTER THREE: The Global Context of the Arab Uprisings

Having located the underlying socioeconomic roots of the "Arab Spring" within the historical transition towards neoliberal forms of governance, a further exploration into the extent to which this socioeconomic condition is related to the *global* transformations of the neoliberal era can be made. In particular, the analysis is concerned with gauging how far the interplay between local and global politico- economic forces is indicative of an emergent TCC.

The structural transformations that occurred in the region over the last three decades, resulting in growing economic malaise and social polarisation, are inseparable from the structural shifts occurring in the global system over the same period. A particularly conspicuous product of neoliberal modes of authoritarian governance in the region has been the intermeshing of ruling domestic elites with local and global economic forces, leading to increasingly technocratic forms of governance. This phenomenon is tied in with the structural transformations of this period that

has seen political structures in the Arab world become increasingly shaped by external market forces.

In Egypt, businessmen held 12% of the parliamentary seats in 1995; by 2010 this had reached 35%, broadly reflecting the regional trend towards technocratic forms of neoliberal governance.[74] The 2004 Government of Egypt (GoE) led by Ahmed Nazif was an exemplar of this trend; it's 'businessman cabinet', was stacked with Western-trained neoliberal adherents, contained no fewer than six monopoly capitalists, and carried out seventeen major privatisations of public-sector enterprises in the first year of governance alone.[75] It epitomised the principle global transformation of this period; namely the expanding influence of global economic forces in shaping domestic affairs. The Nazif cabinet was emblematic of what neo-Gramscian thinkers have termed the TCC. Collectively, they can be classed as an economic elite, empowered by and primarily acting in the interests of global capital.

The reformist actions of the 2004 technocratic GoE included accelerated privatisation, subsidy reform and a massive increase in FDI along neoliberal guidelines.[76] Ultimately, this resulted in a deterioration in living standards for the majority of Egyptians, intensifying the alienation of the middle-class, whilst enriching those at the top. As Angela Joya put it, the cabinet were Western-trained businessmen and economists that were 'well versed in the rules of global capital accumulation and knew how to manipulate those rules to their advantage'.[77] In Egypt, where 40% of the population lived below the poverty line, Ahmed Ezz, the steel magnate who was worth a supposed US$18bn was General Secretary of the NDP, whilst the ministers of Tourism, Housing and The Interior were worth an estimated US$13bn, US$11bn and US$8bn respectively.[78] Ordinary Egyptians were clearly aware of this visible injustice, without necessarily connecting it to the global system. Symbolically, Ezz's house was set fire to during the uprising, whilst the slogan 'by law we want the people's money that has been stolen' became typical of the Egyptian protest rhetoric.[79]

Gamal Mubarak, was part of this Western-educated clique of leading neoliberal proponents and played an active (and publically unpopular) role in the promotion of neoliberal policies.[80] Some commentators cited constitutional amendments in 2005 and 2007 that essentially guaranteed that Gamal would succeed his father as president as an overtly *political* motivation for those involved in the subsequent uprising.[81] Yet Kandil contends that the discontent over the impending transition was significant not because it epitomised the nepotism of the ruling elites, but because of the public perception that the transfer of power from Hosni to Gamal would entail the total empowerment of Egypt's neoliberal practitioners.[82] In a matter of weeks following the 2011 uprising in Egypt, it was reported that Gamal and a number of political and economic associates had been charged with corruption and accruing wealth through political connections.[83] The Egyptian daily Al-Ahram subsequently published a list of bank accounts belonging to Gamal that were evidence of the authenticity of these allegations.[84]

The pattern is recurrent in the Arab region. In Jordan, King Abdullah adopted neoliberal reforms due to 'a combination of personal commitments, pressure from the International Monetary Fund and the demands of a clique of Western-educated technocrats with neoliberal economic views'.[85] In Syria, Hafeez Al-Assad introduced economic liberalisation in the 1970s in tandem with Sadat, leading to endemic corruption within the state bureaucracy.[86] The Syrian businessman and maternal cousin of Bashar al-Assad, Rami Maklouf, is emblematic of the enriching nexus between government and business, benefiting greatly from the monopolisation of the Syrian private sector that occurred during the 1990 period of privatisation. Described as a 'regime financier' in a US diplomatic cable released by Wikileaks, the circumstances of his politically-connected enrichment are synonymous to that in other Arab countries.[87]

The increasingly technocratic nature of governance in the region resonates with neo-Gramscian theorising of the ascendant transnational hegemony of a fraction of the capitalist-class. The Nazif cabinet, for example, embodied the fragment of the TCC that Sklair termed 'globalising bureaucrats and politicians'; predominantly Western-educated and internationally-connected businessmen that were, as Gill posited as typical of the TCC, politically formed at the intersection between the national and transnational class.[88] Maklouf and Ezz are just two examples of such class fractions that have been enriched through the processes of neoliberal globalisation at the expense of wider society in the Arab world. The Arab uprisings, frequently portrayed as domestic in character are therefore in reality inseparable from the global dynamics that have shaped the region and facilitated the transnational hegemony of a fraction of the capitalist class.

The neoliberal agenda was internationally promoted through multiple currents, but one of the most prevalent methods of dissemination was through IFI's such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organisation (WTO), as well as nationally-oriented institutions. IFI's such as the IMF and World Bank provided more than tacit support; they were influential and, at times, coercive instruments that use transnational financial power to restructure national economies in line with the interests of global capital. Neoliberal restructuring with IFI guidance in the Arab case had been continual since the 1970s, but undertook a marked deepening in the early 1990s.[89] Structural adjustment programs (SAPs) have been adopted region-wide, and were instrumental in opening up the region to the forces of global capital. As Farsoun and Zacharia recognised in 1995, SAPs inexorably result in a 'pattern of upward redistribution of resources and income'; having a differential impact upon societies by 'increasing social inequalities while generating volatile political dynamics'.[90]

The global trend of declining state power and authority is especially discernable in the Arab region. In Egypt, the adoption of neoliberal economic policies reduced government revenues, which subsequently curtailed the 'political purchasing power' of the traditional Egyptian political elite, forcing them to cultivate deep connections with private economic forces in order to ensure the survival of the regime.[91] When Mubarak came to power in 1981 he attempted to slow the process of economic liberalisation that had begun under Sadat, but the presence of significant external debt in conjunction with US promises to dramatically cut it if Egypt guaranteed support for the First Gulf War forced Mubarak to accept conditions for economic reform.[92] In 1991 he agreed to a SAP that entailed the widespread privatisation of public assets, trade liberalisation and the removal of progressive social policies, and laid the foundation for further neoliberal deepening.[93] In essence, the state became geared towards the active promotion of business interests, as the regime became increasingly tied to and dependent upon a clique of 'tycoon' capitalists. In 1970 Egypt's debt was at US$1.7bn, yet on the eve of the uprisings in 2011 Egypt had over US$32bn in foreign debt, significantly constraining its capacity to make sovereign decisions.[94] Western investors were 'both the architects and benefactors of infitah', showing how foreign (transnational) capital was in part shaping the dynamics of the region in its own interests.[95]

Yet whilst the economically-liberalising and debt-inducing reforms initiated under Sadat enriched the politico-economic elite, they also weakened the overall power and sovereignty of the state.[96] Santini argued that neoliberal strategies 'further exposed the region, in particular Tunisia and Egypt, to the forces of the 2008 global financial crisis, exacerbating legitimation crises rather than preventing them'.[97]

A reduced capacity to respond is also paradoxically discernable in the presence of an extensive security apparatus. Whilst public spending has been cut across the board as a consequence of neoliberal policy, the security forces are the exception. Egypt's 'monstrous police apparatus', for example, numbers 1,200,000 men and is illustrative of the phenomenon, identified by Amin and others, that the growth of the security apparatus goes hand-in-hand with exposure to neoliberal economic policies.[98]

An analysis of glowing World Bank and IMF reports on a selection of MENA countries preceding the 2011 uprisings are evidence that some of the major socioeconomic problems of the region were intermeshed with the global neoliberal project. The analysis reveals a disjuncture between policy and reality, and exposes the political basis of the neoliberal agenda. Furthermore, retrospective attempts to limit the causes to internal political legacies are suggestive of a political strategy to reify the neoliberal agenda in spite of its evident contradictions.

In Libya, an IMF report released on 15 February 2011, the same week that protests began, gave an overwhelmingly positive appraisal of the regime and its economy, praising privatisation, in particular 'an ambitious program to privatize banks', and an increase in FDI, as well as encouraging further structural reforms.[99] This is an illuminating example of how the IFI's were detached from the reality of their economic policies. As Achcar put it; 'from the standpoint of ordinary people in Libya, which is very different from the IMF's, the results of economic liberalisation offered considerably less cause for satisfaction.'[100] The IMF also described Egypt as an 'emerging success story' in 2007, whilst the World Bank named it the 'top reformer' for 2006/7, unfortunately coinciding with a period of unprecedented levels of poverty, unemployment and inequality.[101] Yet the most salient example of this theme came in September of 2010, when the IMF praised Ben-Ali's structural reforms, in particular highlighting an increased standard rate of VAT, a reform that disproportionately affects lower-income earners.[102] A matter of

weeks later Bouazzizi infamously had his cart upturned by Tunisian security forces – an action which some commentators interpreted as related to his status as part of the informal economy and thus not paying this VAT.[103]

In response to the events of 2011, the rhetoric changed, and an overt emphasis was placed upon what the institutions (in line with mainstream Western thinking) perceived as the *political* causes of the unrest, detaching the uprisings from their socioeconomic roots. A World Bank report entitled 'Towards a new partnership for inclusive growth in the MENA region' is typical of the stance taken , claiming that 'the events [of the Arab Spring] are fundamentally political', and blaming 'declining state legitimacy, low levels of political participation, nepotism, perceptions of corruption and predation, and little accountability'.[104] Accordingly, the proposed solution was 'a more vigorous pursuit of inclusive globalisation'.[105]

In the wake of the uprisings Obama espoused the same neoliberal line decreeing the problem to be the regions "closed economies", insisting that "protectionism must give way to openness" and proposing World Bank, IMF and EU assistance to help countries in "tearing down the walls" through economic liberalisation, in order to fulfil "international obligations".[106] At the G8 summit in France in May of 2011, the Deauville partnership offered US$20bn to Egypt and Tunisia, under the rhetoric of aiding a 'transition to democracy'.[107] The rhetoric ignores the tacit support of the dictatorships provided by the same institutions only months prior to the summit, and as Hanieh argues, the rush to provide aid and investment initiatives represented 'a conscious attempt to consolidate and reinforce the power of Egypt's dominant class in the face of ongoing popular mobilisations'.[108] From the perspective of those who see neoliberalism as class-based political project, this represents an attempt to consolidate and even extend the hegemonic power of transnational capitalist forces in the region in the wake of what was ultimately a crisis of neoliberalism.

The policy of the IFI's both preceding and following the Arab uprisings is therefore reflective of the politics behind the policy. The neoliberal agenda, presented by its proponents in apolitical terms and through an emphasis on objective 'scientific efficiency', in reality contains significant contradictions, and must take considerable responsibility for the structural tensions that manifested in a regional socioeconomic crisis, ultimately precipitating the "Arab Spring". Furthermore, efforts to attribute the events of 2011 to solely endogenous political causes deliberately detach the uprisings from their socioeconomic roots and are indicative of the political nature of the neoliberal project.

Yet whilst situating the Arab uprisings within the context of global systemic tension is an analytical necessity, and imperative to understanding the structural roots of the Arab crisis, a balanced view also acknowledges a host of specific local, national and regional variants that are dialectically intertwined with the global context. A nuanced view can thus locate the fundamental roots of the discontent in structural problems related to the global capitalist system whilst simultaneously acknowledging that an array of other factors specific to the region define the form and dynamics of the uprisings as they appear and progress.

As previously argued, the state has increasingly been shaped by the global market, to the point where Weberian notions of the state as a self-contained monopolistic entity are almost obsolete. Yet it would be imprecise to see the political apparatus as entirely subordinate to external forces. The Arab state has become increasingly subordinate to global dynamics, yet there are still many specifically-Arab characteristics whose role cannot be neglected.

On balance, the specific structural elements that define the region as a concentrated hub of (neo) patrimonial rentier states have given an added propensity for capitalism to manifest in crony and nepotistic forms and must be taken into account. The regions rentierism, for example, comes not just from oil, but from a range of sources including gas, minerals, as well as host of geographical rents, such as the Suez canal and pipeline tolls. As Achcar explains, rentier states do not rely to the same degree on taxation from the public, and thus have less 'motivation' to be democratic.[109] As a result the region is characterised by a varied amalgamation of previously existing (neo) patrimonial political structures within a neoliberal framework, resulting in conditions in which 'crony capitalism' flourishes.[110] Thus, the specific *type* of neoliberal-capitalism that exists in the region is conceivably more pernicious (due to its implementation within the context of a patrimonial state) than in other regions where a neoliberal agenda has been undertaken.

The capacity of states to respond to the structural crises and prevent serious uprisings is also clearly dependent upon specific factors. The oil-wealthy Gulf States, for example, were able to prevent unrest from mutating into a serious challenge to the regime. In Saudi Arabia, King Abdullah responded by using the extensive Saudi oil-revenues to quickly release a US$130bn social plan including subsidising housing and creating more employment opportunities.[111] Contrast this to Yemen, where in the absence of any economic capacity to respond Saleh attempted to placate the populace through constitutional reform, a tactic that inevitably failed, due to the origins of the crisis being primarily socioeconomic, not political.[112]

The role of internal forces is further exemplified by the military in both Egypt and Tunisia, who have been pointed to as enabling factors that allowed the uprisings to morph from protest to revolution; if they had intervened in the interests of Ben-Ali or Mubarak, there would have been little hope for regime change. Sectarian divisions also influenced the shape of protest in the region, hijacking basal discontent and channelling it into political objectives. Syria and Bahrain both have governments ruled by minorities, and whilst Saudi troops quelled what could have been a populist uprising in Bahrain, as the protests in Syria progressed they took on an increasingly sectarian character and eventually culminated in civil war. In the situation of Libya too, where regionalism has historically been a strong force, the tumultuous regional discontent quickly took the form of a sectarian conflict.[113]

Thus whilst the systemic origins of the discontent are identifiable, the dynamics of the unrest are largely defined by the specific context they arise under. The outcome and character of the uprisings was, and is, in large part decided by the specific context of each country, and the capacity of the regime to respond. Yet that is not to detract from the *systemic origins* of the discontent, which is connected to the project of neoliberal globalisation and the differential integration of the region into the global economic system. To quote Amin; 'the components of the movements differ from one country to the other, just like the forms of their integration into imperialist [neoliberal] globalisation and the structures if their established regimes'.[114] Therefore the socioeconomic crisis of the Arab world is neither an explicitly internal affair, nor the sole product of the global forces of capitalist agency. Bogaert argued that 'the local is not just a product of the global, but also an agent in globalisation', and thus it is this dialectical entanglement that the uprisings arise from.[115]

CHAPTER FOUR: A Structural Comparison

Building upon the global linkages related to the deleterious effects of neoliberal economic development identified in the Arab region, a comparison with other notable contemporary social movements of this period reveals that they arose out of a similar structural context. The movements' are shown to share core grievances that are fundamentally related to the neoliberal economic model, and a roughly congruent demographic composition.

In parallel to the Arab context, the UN Human Development Report of 2010 unequivocally showed that globally, and within countries, 'rising income inequality is the norm', with some studies putting the worlds GINI coefficient (measure of inequality) in a state of deterioration since 1988, and coinciding with the expanding reach of neoliberal globalisation.[116] It is therefore understandable that there is a degree of congruence between the Arab uprisings and other movements of this period that experienced similar socioeconomic contexts. A combination of this rising inequality and the increasing precariousness of everyday existence against a backdrop of general impoverishment were previously defined as the socioeconomic condition responsible for the Arab uprisings. Similar forms of this condition are also discernable in a range of ostensibly separate contemporary movements occurring in tandem across the globe. This is chiefly due to the fact that whilst the socioeconomic substructures of various regions around the world differ, the general trend of significantly increasing rising inequality and erosion of public gains since the 1980s generally does not.[117]

Neoliberal globalisation is charged with disrupting national class structures, leading to the emergence of a 'fragmented global class structure' in which social fragments have been marginalised on a *trans*national scale.[118]

Standing has described these social fragments as a 'proliferating precariat', a term which usefully describes the social group active at the core of the Arab uprisings and the other contemporary social movements.[119] When Kandil spoke of 'a social group harbouring middle class aspiration by virtue of white collar education and modern outlook, but whose income is steadily diminishing' he was describing the social fragment driving the Egyptian uprising, yet he could also have been describing those driving the Israeli 'social justice' protests, Occupy, or the *Indignado* movements in Spain and Greece.[120]

The Israeli movement for social justice, for example, was the largest protest in Israel's history, involving over 430,000 protesters from a variety of social backgrounds, but was instigated by a marginalised segment of the middle-class that formed the core of the movement.[121] Contemporary commentators spoke of a 'profound sense of frustration felt by members of Israel's struggling middle class', highlighting the fact that 'many have good degrees and decent jobs but still find they are unable to make ends meet'.[122]

The Israeli protests were commonly interpreted as a purely internal issue; a spontaneous backlash against exorbitantly high housing prices. Such a view severs the events from their systemic roots and obfuscates the multifaceted reality of the problem. Arguably, these roots are fundamentally located in the market liberalisation that began in the 1990s. Initially sparking an increase in the standard of living for many Israelis, the neoliberal trajectory deepened from 2000 onwards resulting in an erosion of many social protections previously in place for workers and a contraction of the welfare state.[123] A reduction in state support for the middle-class in the area of housing (the focus of the movement at its inception) was a part of this neoliberal deepening, and the last decade of neoliberal policies in Israel saw both an objective and *perceived* deterioration of economic life for the youth in general, and particularly of the middle-class.[124]

The protests were unprecedented; Israel did not have comparable levels of youth or general unemployment as Europe or the Arab world, had not been hit as hard by the 2008 crisis, and social policy was generally perceived as peripheral in Israeli politics.[125] Yet this apparent stability belied the socioeconomic reality that underpinned the 2011 protests. Rosenhek and Shalev echo Achcar's diagnosis of the Arab uprisings when they spoke of the 'relative deprivation' experienced by the middle-class, and the younger generation in particular, highlighting a deterioration in economic opportunity and 'ever-widening gaps in the distribution of economic resources' as principle causes for the unrest.[126] Thus, protests that began with the specific issue of unaffordable housing expanded to demand nothing less than a radical overhaul of Israeli society and economy, including free education and childcare, tax reform, an end to privatisation, and increased public investment.[127]

Similarly, the Occupy movement, which by 2011 was active in over 1,500 cities globally, outlined in its 'principles of solidarity' that the movement was primarily concerned with 'daring to imagine a new socio-political and economic alternative that offers greater possibility of equality'.[128] Statistics from the US Census Bureau show the US to be indicative of the global trend towards greater income disparity since the 1970s.[129] In 1976 the top 1% of Americans accounted for 9% of the share of US income; by 2007 this had reached 23.5%, reflecting both increasing inequality and the marginalisation of middle-class elements.[130] A survey profiling those involved in the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement subsequently depicted an image of a disaffected middle-class; identifying that 'precarious employment was a common experience among our respondents', most of whom were young, predominantly white and college educated.[131] Langman further characterised a key constituent in the OWS movement as 'college graduates with huge student loans [that] were unemployed or underemployed'.[132]

In austerity-ridden Spain and in Greece, the *Indignado* movement became an overt mass rejection of neoliberalism. In Greece, even before the unprecedentedly severe EU/IMF austerity was imposed, the period 1995-2010 was characterised by a stagnation and reduction in wages, stringently limited benefits for the unemployed and 'the expansion of precarious jobs'.[133] Conservative estimates put Spanish and Greek youth unemployment rates at around 43% for the start of 2011.[134] Subsequently, echoing other contemporary movements, a significant proportion of its composition involved an educated, yet marginalised and unemployed youth.[135] The reputable journalist Arianna Huffington, who had first-hand experience of the Spanish protests, also termed them a 'truly middle-class movement'.[136]

According to Castañeda, the movement signified how dissatisfaction with the economic and political status quo had mobilised collective action not only in the MENA region, but also within the countries of the global North.[137] Harvey has referred to the global 2008 crisis as 'a crisis of neoliberalism' in which the resulting austerity was 'above all an excuse to make deeper cuts in social expenditure and public services' and to pursue, with renewed intensity, the same neoliberal policies that have been advocated since the 1970s.[138] Ha-joon Chang has drawn attention to the similarity between the IMF SAPs that were applied in the Global South (in the MENA region, particularly from the 1990s onwards) and IMF-driven austerity in the Global North. He argues that 'European governments [are] inflicting an old-style IMF programme on their own populations'.[139] The *perception* of a further deterioration in the socioeconomic condition is also evident in the motivations behind the *Indignado* movement. A report on European austerity compiled in September of 2011 concluded that the EU and the IMF are engaged in 'a model of prolonged austerity', characterised by 'wage cuts, and attacks on job security and pensions'.[140]

Harvey's work exposes that fact that monopoly and oligopoly are recurrent features of neoliberal deregulation, and the visible polarisation of wealth that was a central grievance in the Arab uprisings is an identifiable source of discontent in the other contemporary movements.[141] Just as Ezz, Makhlouf, and other neoliberal profiteers were targeted during the Arab uprisings, symbols of extreme wealth were also a focal point for other contemporary movements. In Israel, as in many of the Arab states, oligarchical business tycoons epitomised this growing inequality and were targeted by the protest movements, particularly after a 2006 Forbes report was released that argued the entire economy was controlled by 12 business groups.[142] The Financial Times reported in May of 2010 that the rising influence and wealth of the countries oligarchs has caused controversy and fuelled public anger.[143] Furthermore, the Occupy movement's claim of 'we are the 99%' and the nomenclature of the European '*Indignados'*, which translates literally into 'the outraged', are both rhetorically reflective of the 'general climate of indignation' in which corrupt politicians and self-indulgent bankers were publically lambasted.[144]

The diminished capacity of the state to 'intervene in the economy and regulate social conflict' has also been central to the movements, and the movements from the Arab world to Occupy have taken a form conspicuously devoid of ideology.[145] In Israel, frustration with conventional politics was prevalent, particularly amongst the youth, the very group that formed part of the core of the 2011 movement. Similarly, the *Indignado's* were widely described as 'anti-system' and 'apolitical', targeting the state for its failure to provide for the people, whilst the Occupy movement organised around the principles of 'real', grass-roots, participatory democracy in perceived contrast to the failure of the US political system.[146] Significantly, in the case of Occupy, anger was focused more on corporations than the state, calling for 'democracy not corporatocracy', conceivably in recognition of the structural shifts that had brought about the ascendant power of these global economic forces.[147]

This perception and immediate reality of increasing socioeconomic 'precarity' that was pointed to as a critical factor in the Arab instance is therefore also central to other contemporary movements. There is also a demographic congruence between the movements in that, at least in their inception, the backbone of each movement was comprised of fragments of a marginalised middle-class, particularly involving a disaffected, graduate youth. Through their popular progression, ostensibly spontaneous character and ideological dearth, the movements have also managed to unite other class elements. The movements, which like the Arab Spring were typically portrayed as spontaneous, in fact have traceable historical roots and share many of the persistent underlying features of neoliberal economic development.

The intersecting anti-neoliberal aims and demographic congruence of the movements can be explained in *global* terms within a neo-Gramscian conceptual framework. In explanation of how previously undisturbed middle-class fragments have been marginalised on a global scale, Robinson argues that (neoliberal) globalisation had the effect of creating 'new forms of transnational class relations across borders and new forms of class cleavages globally and within countries, regions, cities and local communities'.[148] The presence of a marginalised middle class 'precariat' is thus a transnational phenomenon that has arisen as a structural consequence of the hegemony of global capital in the world system.

CHAPTER FIVE: One Facet of a Global Movement?

Having established that the protest movements contain basic structural and demographic similarities, further depth can be added to the comparison through an exploration of the interaction between specific elements of these movements, giving insight into linkages and commonalities within the context of a global system. Transnational interactions are both evidence of the underlying shared structural origins of the contemporary social movements and also hint at the embryonic emergence of a coordinated transnational movement arising in opposition to what Robinson has termed the 'hegemony of global capital'.[149]

Della Porta has shown how globalisation has meant that 'social relationships in a given time and place are increasingly influenced by actions that occur in different places'.[150] In this sense, transnational resistance is simultaneously mobilised against and empowered by different forms of globalisation. A phenomenon that is particularly relevant to this has been the growing integration between domestic activists and transnational movements through networks loosely organised around the idea of a 'global civil society'. From a neo-Gramscian viewpoint, the construction of a nascent global civil society can be theorised as a systemic reaction to neoliberal globalisation. Gill attests that 'as capitalist social relations are being globalized, so too is resistance increasingly globalized'.[151]

Abdelrahman's research explores this phenomenon. Focusing on Egypt, she explains the importance of looking beyond 'the simple proliferation of protests and activities' and seeing an underlying 'networking of collective action' as being the fundamental driver of social change'.[152] Central to this idea is that the strength of a given movement resides in the wider network it is connected to. Abdelrahman explores the relationship between the Egyptian anti-globalisation group (AGEG) and the Global Justice Movement (GJM), a supranational 'movement of movements' whose fundamental characteristic is defined by Della Porta as 'its ability to develop *a common interpretation of reality* to nurture solidarity and collective identifications'.[153] By cultivating this link between global structures and local realities, AGEG grew, even attracting notable speakers through the network such as Samir Amin.[154]

The globally coordinated protests of 15 October 2011 served as a nexus for progressive contemporary social movements and are an illustration of rudimentary transnational interaction within a 'global civil society' framework. Chosen to coincide with the 5 month anniversary of the Spanish protests, the movement saw action in more than 950 cities worldwide in over 80 countries.[155] Promoted by the international network 'Take the Square', the principle aim of the movement was 'to build a network between all of us … We know that the powers are global, that we live in a globalized world, and therefore our answer should be global too'.[156] Through the neo-Gramscian conceptual lens such a movement represents an incipient, yet conscious attempt at challenging a system based upon the hegemony of transnational forces. The established network of relationships that constitutes this 'global civil society' provided the structure from which the movements of 2011 were able to effectively mobilise on a transnational level. The political scientist Benjamin Barber recognised the importance of transnational collaboration when he wrote in January of 2011; 'The spirit of Tahrir still lives, but … cannot prevail without significant cross-border cooperation and civic foundation-building assistance.[157]

Viewing these movements as part of a nascent global civil society fits the neo-Gramscian template, yet it also has its limitations. AGEG for example, is clearly not reflective of the Egyptian protest movement in its entirety, just as relationships to transnational networks do not fundamentally define the other contemporary movements. The majority of those involved in the strikes and protests preceding the Arab uprisings and other contemporary movements did not harbour grandiose feelings of transnational solidarity, but were principally concerned with their immediate individual, local or national predicament. Yet this does not detract from the fact that such transnational solidarity is indicative of a convergence of aims, nor that a rudimentary global network exists. The fact that the transnational connections made between the movements are growing yet still relatively limited can be explained by the fact that discontent tends to be directed internally. To quote Eckstein, 'labour's anger is typically directed at their bosses … not at broad invisible forces like capitalism or distant agents of capitalism, like banks, which may ultimately be responsible for their plight'. [158]

Interestingly, Abdelrahman argues that it was by virtue of being middle-class in their composition that some of the Egyptian movements collectively cultivated transnational linkages to the extent that they did. Access to technologies such as the internet, computer literacy and exposure to the outside world are all elements she defines as being central to 'global networking' that may exclude low-income groups.[159] This is an insight that theoretically can be extended to explain the proliferation of transnational linkages evident in the other (largely middle-class) contemporary movements. This adds nuance by showing that it was not solely the presence of a common source of discontent underpinning the movements that fostered transnational solidarity, but a *consciousness* of it and a means by which to communicate and express that in transnational terms.

Whilst 2011 displayed a significant deepening of the relationships between domestic and transnational networks, the connections were forged on a predominantly rhetorical basis, rather than any active or practical collusion. An example of this that typifies rhetorical attempts to cultivate the perception of a shared struggle comes from a collective of Egyptian activists in a message of solidarity to those involved in the Occupy movement. The message claimed that the Occupiers 'are now in many ways involved in the same struggle. What most pundits call "the Arab Spring" has its roots in the demonstrations, riots, strikes and occupations taking place all around the world, its foundations lie in years-long struggles by people and popular movements', also emphasising that a 'generation across the globe' has grown up realising that 'the interests of government increasingly cater to the interests and comforts of private, transnational capital'.[160] OWS was itself sparked by the activist group 'Adbusters' who claimed the idea was 'inspired by the Egyptian Tahrir Square uprising', whilst leading figures from the Egyptian uprising have engaged in giving tactical advice to the OWS protesters.[161] When Adbusters first attempted to mobilise support, they sent out an email claiming that 'America needs its own Tahrir'.[162] The Occupy movement also built upon the *Indignado* movement within Europe; Castañeda's research as a non-participant observer of the *Indignado* movement in Spain led him to conclude that it was 'a direct precedent' to the Occupy movement.[163]

The Arab Spring served to catalyse other contemporary social movements that were progressive in character, but these movements in turn served to inspire each other. In an increasingly globalised world, connected by new technologies such as the internet, people in one place could become instantly informed of and connected to other struggles that they could identify with.[164] Rosenhek convincingly argues that the shared rhetoric of ''the 99% vs. the 1%'in the USA; 'the people against bankers and politicians' in Spain; and 'the middle class versus the tycoons' in Israel' represents a new identity based upon the (global) structure of inequality.[165] The rhetoric itself denotes a type of universalism and supports the view that the movements are the beginnings of a transnational response to what is essentially a transnational capitalist hegemony. Yet ultimately, at this particular juncture, such shows of solidarity serve primarily to reify the *idea* of a unity of struggles, rather than facilitate any practical application of action.

These movements also share a similar structural configuration. Horizontally organised, leaderless and utilising similar tactics, the movements from the Middle-East to Europe and North America took a comparable form. The Arab uprisings were characteristically leaderless, operating in a horizontal fashion that was disassociated from the realm of traditional political currents such as parties and institutions. In clear mimesis, the Occupy, *Indignado* and Israeli movements took the same form, empowered to an extent by New Media technologies, but also shaped by the changing nature of the global system, where state power was becoming increasingly irrelevant in the face of the global economic forces. When Time magazine announced their 'person of the year' for 2011, they chose the 'anonymous protester', reflecting this leaderless, horizontal form that characterised the popular mobilisations across the world.[166]

The occupation of public spaces was a tactic that, inspired by Tahrir, became ubiquitous amongst the connected contemporary movements, representing a concerted transnational strategy of resistance.[167] Swyngedouw has argued that the very act of encampment is 'a political act that stages collectively the presumption of equality'.[168] This insight was echoed by the prominent Egyptian activist Asmaa Mafouz in her appeal to movements across the globe; 'movements today are truly global. They work in symbiosis, learning from and imitating each others' strategies'. From Tahrir Square in Egypt to Syntagma Square in Greece, Puerta del Sol in Spain and Zuccotti Park in New York, occupation has represented a symbolic show of transnational solidarity.

Concurrent with an increasing awareness of the transnational nature of many of their struggles, anti-systemic movements of this period have also found common ground in directing their energies towards mutual criticisms of the IFI's and technocratic elites in general.

The 100,000 strong demonstrations against the WTO in Seattle in 1999 were an important historical moment in the formation of a transnational movement against the power of these institutions. According to Della Porta, the experience of Seattle was instrumental in bringing criticism of neoliberal forms of globalisation into the public sphere on a global level.[169] Since then recurrent protests across the globe directed at the IMF and associated IFI's have taken a variety of forms, seen by many as a direct response to the homogenising effect of neoliberal globalisation.[170] As a part of the 'global civil society' movement, Seattle and the alter-globalisation movement influenced the Arab uprisings by providing a foundational structure for transnational linkages to form, dialectically engaging with both the local (by mobilising Arab support) and the global (by influencing other social movements across the globe).

The IFI's are often seen by critics as instruments of Western economic exploitation, projecting financial power into 'developing' countries and opening markets for Western capital. Yet equally, in Europe itself the search for a solution to the contemporary capitalist crisis came not from national, democratically elected governments, but from international and supranational institutions, and a host of technocrats.[171] *Indignado* anti-austerity protests also targeted the IMF.[172] Just as 'Egyptians felt the effects of neoliberal budget cuts', so did those living in Spain, Greece, Israel and the US.[173] Chomsky recognises this when, in drawing attention to the IMF and World Bank's parallel roles in facilitating destabilising neoliberal policies in the 'Arab Spring' and Latin America, he also tentatively explores the idea that 'the *Indignados* in Southern Europe and the Occupy movement … are in a sense similar' due to them being 'consequences of the Western version of the neoliberal system'.[174]

By situating national problems within a transnational context, and through an often highly symbolic condemnation of the IFIs, such networks have exposed commonalities between a range of movements, simultaneously creating and reifying transnational relationships based upon a growing awareness of the systemic basis of their struggle. As Parker has shown, neoliberal globalisation has been significant in transposing class dynamics onto the international plane; 'neoliberal reforms enable the reconstitution of class power by articulating it to networks of finance, government and expertise that span the planet'.[175] Thus the targeting of IFIs and their domestic technocratic counterparts represents a shift in protest dynamics, an adaption to the transformations that have to an extent homogenised many local social struggles across the world. The crisis caused by neoliberal economic development in Europe and North America is therefore of the same structural origin (despite variation in the extent and manner with which it has provoked a social reaction) as that experienced in the Arab world.

There are, of course, limits to how far a comparison between these social movements can be made, both in terms of their structural origins and the extent to which transnational networks of support have flourished. Each movement typically contains a multiplicity of demands and individual idiosyncrasies related to its specific context. However, it is also pertinent to establish that what the movements may have changed into following their initial inception is not misconstrued as their original form. As Abdelrahman elucidates; 'no struggle for any set of demands could remain confined within itself, but gave birth to and fuelled other struggles'.[176] In the process, movements can give currency to other struggles distinct from the initial grievances. Furthermore, fostering solidarity between movements can also be a mobilising tactic; to strengthen the individual movement by connecting it to a larger one, and therefore not *necessarily* reflective of any consciously-identifiable structural relationship. Yet in the instance of 2011, a clearly identifiable underlying structural relationship largely negates such a view.

The struggles are therefore clearly not analogous in all respects. In the Arab context, for example, the immediate stakes for the average protester involved are much higher. Whereas the typical Occupy protester may at most encounter pepper spray and a baton, those involved in the Arab uprisings frequently faced live ammunition, torture, and the possibility of death. Furthermore, the aggravating socioeconomic conditions that drove the movements vary in both severity and configuration, in large part because the historical experiences of the different regions have been patently different. As Hashemi argues, the transformation of traditional societies through modern socioeconomic and political currents has been 'more pronounced and qualitatively different in the case of Muslim societies than in the

West'.[177] Yet as Harvey showed, the very nature of neoliberal globalisation is that it is intrinsically an uneven process. As such it is expected to have a differentiated effect across different localities, with the local and global locked in a process of perpetually changing dialectical entwinement. Whilst each movement has its own specificities, there are also features fundamental to the process of neoliberal globalisation that are persistent throughout and form the core demands of the movements.

Therefore these contextual and historical differences do not detract from the proposition that the structural origins of the uprisings are located in a global system defined by the ascendant hegemony of transnational capital, because they concern only the specificities of individual movements, and do not comprehensively change the underlying systemic process, which explains the *global pattern* of uprisings. In short, the sum of the dynamics of the individual movement can be explained and predicted by the broad dynamics of the global system.

Conclusion

The analysis therefore offers several important conclusions. Firstly, that the events commonly termed the "Arab Spring" have their roots in the structural transformation of the global system brought about by the ideological ascension of neoliberalism to a position of global predominance. These shifts entailed, amongst other things, a change in the historical configuration of capital, resulting in the decline of state power relative to the ascendant power of *globalised* capital, and culminating in a transnational capitalist class emerging as a hegemonic force. A historical investigation into the core grievances of the Arab uprising revealed the crisis of the Arab world to be fundamentally socioeconomic, and intimately connected to the emergence of neoliberal forms of governance in the region. A further exploration of the role of IFIs and other actors acting in the interests of transnational capital demonstrated this socioeconomic problematic to be fundamentally related to the changing global configuration of power. In particular, technocratic elites and other politically-empowered economic forces in the Arab world are emblematic of neo-Gramscian theorising of an emergent TCC. This is not to say that the Arab crisis was exclusively of socioeconomic origin, nor that the "Arab Spring" was solely the product of neoliberal globalisation, but rather that the causes of the uprisings were complex and multifaceted, whilst still being *inextricably linked* to these global processes, a point that evades most established theories on the Arab uprisings.

Secondly, and as a logical corollary to the first conclusion, a comparison with other contemporary progressive social movements reveals that the key sources of socioeconomic tension identified in the Arab context as persistent features of neoliberalism are also present in the structural emergence of the other movements. The perception and objective reality of rising inequality and increasing social 'precarity' related to unemployment and general economic malaise were all intrinsic aspects of neoliberal policy that were present to varying degrees in each of these contexts. The acute social polarisation resulting from this transnationally-propagated neoliberal agenda was most significant in the marginalisation of key fragments of the middle-classes, and the alienation of a disaffected (graduate) youth. This was reflected in the roughly congruent demographic composition that the movements from the "Arab Spring" to Occupy shared (at least at their inception) as well as in their leaderless, horizontally-organised form, ideological dearth, and tactical mimesis.

Critically, there is a shared *perception* of increasing inequality and economic hardship that is recurrent in all of the movements, and whilst the deleterious socioeconomic conditions differ in intensity between the movements, the *experience* of *relative* depravation may not. This 'relative deprivation' is therefore a common experience shared by participants across the movements. Thus, despite arising from a variety of contexts, containing a multiplicity of other specific grievances and demands and often with the movements ultimately following a different trajectory, in their inception the movements were formed in spontaneous rejection of the neoliberal program.

This insight is compounded through an exploration of the extent to which these movements interacted and identified with each other. The movements clearly drew inspiration from each other and elements within each movement attempted to cultivate transnational linkages through the recognition of commonalities. At the particular juncture that the movements of 2011 occupied, such transnational linkages were growing, but limited, and largely comprised of rhetorical displays of solidarity. Despite this, conscious attempts to form a nascent global civil society had been made, and a collective recognition between the movements' of their shared orientation against neoliberalism had

been elucidated. These interactions, whilst limited, have thus not only reified the recognition that they are structurally interconnected, but also hinted at the emergence of an embryonic global movement that is transnational organised. In order to explore this notion further, a more comprehensive study involving the other social movements of this period, from India and Iceland to Chile and Mexico, should be undertaken.

More broadly, these conclusions are all drawn in accordance with the neo-Gramscian perspective of the global-system and serve to reify it as an increasingly salient theory. A further conclusion, therefore, is that the purported hegemonic emergence of a TCC and an inchoate transnational anti-systemic movement in reaction to it are relevant concepts reflected in the reality of the contemporary global-system that have to an extent been substantiated by this analysis and require further exploration.

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