The Egyptian revolution of January 25, 2011 as an anti-systemic movement

Amany Abdellatif Osman

Faculty of Economics and Political Science, Cairo University, Cairo, Egypt

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to analyze the Egyptian revolution as an anti-systemic movement. It illustrates how Egypt's position in the world-economy has affected its political economy orientation and led to the marginalization of critical masses, who launched the revolution.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper follows Wallerstein's world-system analysis focusing on the anti-systemic movement concept. The paper analyzes the Egyptian case based on Annales school's *longue durée* concept, which is a perspective to study developments of social relations historically.

Findings – The Egyptian revolution was not only against the autocratic regime but also against the power structure resulting from the neoliberal economic policies, introduced as a response to the capitalism crisis. It represented the voice of the forgotten. The revolution was one of the anti-systemic movements resisting the manifestations of the capitalist world-economy.

Originality/value – This paper aims at proving that the Egyptian revolution was an anti-systemic movement; which will continue to spread as a rejection to the world-system and to aspire a more democratic and egalitarian world. The current COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating the crisis of the world-system.

Keywords Capitalism, Neo-liberalism, Anti-systemic movements, Egyptian revolution, World-systems analysis, Neoliberalism

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Globally, 2011 was a year of revolt worldwide, what was called by occupy wall street “the 99%” against the growing inequality, corruption and undemocratic practices (Wallerstein, 2012). Although the roots of the revolts went back to before December 2010, the events taking place in the Arab world started by Tunisia, then followed by Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria imposed a major challenge to the widespread belief in Arab exceptionalism, which raises trails to understand the reasons behind these revolutions. *In this context, despite the narrative that the current world-system led recently to improving the quality of life, we have been witnessing, according to Wallerstein, the eruption of anti-systemic movements around the world against inequality and undemocratic practices. Accordingly, this study focuses on the Egyptian revolution and its relation to the world-system. This paper answers the main research question as follows: How have the capitalist world-economy and its division of labor*

affected Egypt's political economy, and power relation in the society and created an environment suitable for anti-systemic movement?

For the purpose of answering the main research question, the paper is divided into the following three sections:

- (1) An overview of the world-systems analysis; focusing on anti-systemic movements as a crucial concept.
- (2) The development of the Egyptian political economy was based on *longue durée*.
- (3) The anti-systemic movement as a tool to analyze the Egyptian revolution, based on the common features of anti-systemic movements.

The paper uses the anti-systemic movements as an analytical tool to understand the Egyptian revolution, by tracing the development of the Egyptian political economy in relation to the world-system and analyzing the effects of Egypt's position in the world-economy on the critical masses, that launched the revolution.

2. Literature review

One of the most striking features of the revolution literature is that the issue has ignited intense interest and controversy across a range of academic disciplines. In this regard, this study has covered the aspects explained below.

A trend of research focused on the future of revolutions. The first group concluded that the revolution will not end in the future, as the gap between north and south will be widened with the spread of globalization, which is the highest stage of capitalism. Two main subjects related to globalization affect the future of revolution; poverty and the state role (Foran, 2003). The other group believed in the end of revolutions, as factors leading to revolutions declined, despite capitalism's global crisis in the 1990s (Snyder, 1999).

Another trend of research focused on the Egyptian revolution of January 25, 2011. While one study analyzed the revolution's internal economic and political factors, it used the system theory, despite being a conservative approach (Abdel-Salam, 2015). Other studies used the political economy approach previewing Mubarak's economic policy as creating a precondition for the revolution (Roccu, 2013; Joya, 2011). Besides, some other studies focused on the role of a specific class on the revolution (Kandil, 2012; Beinin, 2012). While another study focused on the changes that happened to the urban middle class related to the state role in the pre-revolution era (Hassan, 2016).

A final trend of research analyzed the Occupy movement as an anti-systemic movement, in the light of its relation to other anti-systemic movements and to the world-system crisis (Reifer, 2013; Macpherson and Smith, 2013). Another study linked revolution to changes in the world-system and concluded that the Egyptian revolution aimed at achieving democracy, social progress and national independence. However, these results are redundancy of what Samir Amin has concluded (Amin, 2011a). The study criticized Wallerstein for including human rights organizations and environmentalists as anti-systemic movements. However, Wallerstein stressed the importance of environmentalists and human rights organizations, despite being less anti-systemic today. The study did not answer the main research question, which is to identify whether the Egyptian revolution was a struggle within or against the system (Demir).

This study seeks to fill the gap in the literature through applying Wallerstein's anti-systemic movements' concept to the Egyptian revolution of 25 January and avoiding the limitations of Demir's study. Wallerstein's analysis is rarely used to analyze the Egyptian

revolution despite its importance as a holistic perspective integrating internal and external factors, leading to significant results.

3. Approach

3.1 *World-systems analysis*

The world-systems analysis, as presented by Immanuel Wallerstein, was generated as a result to the limitations of the existing theories prior to 1968 in understanding the new realities imposed by the 1968 revolution (Wallerstein, 2013d, pp. 3–4), which spread in many places over around three years and represented a watershed event in the history of the world-system (Wallerstein and Zukin, 1989, p. 431).

The unit of analysis is world-systems (Wallerstein, 2006, p. 16), which is defined as follows:

“A social system, one that has boundaries, structures, member groups, rules of legitimation and coherence. Its life is made up of the conflicting forces which hold it together by tension and tear it apart as each group seeks eternally to remold it to its advantage” (Wallerstein, 1974, p. 347).

The modern world-system is a capitalist world-economy and is characterized by as follows:

- Endless accumulation of capital.
- The life cycle of the system, which comes now to the structural crisis, resulted from equilibrium discrepancies.
- Increasing polarization is represented by steadily growing inequality within and among states (Wallerstein, 2013a).

The capitalist world-economy is divided, based on the division of labor into two main areas, namely, the cores and periphery. The difference is the degree of profitability. This leads to unequal exchange (Wallerstein, 2006, p. 28). The semi-periphery exists in the middle of the hierarchy and works as a buffer zone to ease the polarization in the world economy (Chirot and Hall, 1982, p. 85). This division is reflected in the state structure as core states are strengthened at the expense of peripheries and this is applied to wages (Wallerstein, 2000, p. 56).

3.2 *Anti-systemic movements*

The concept is used as the analytical perspective to the capitalist world-system, as the system causes the eruption of those movements (Arrighi *et al.*, 1989, p. 1). It refers to organized movements by people aspiring to a more democratic and equal world-system and it represents a resistance to the modern/capitalist world-system. In certain times, it represented a world revolution (Robinson, 2011, p. 732). These movements share the same goal, which is “struggling against the established power structures in an effort to bring into existence a more democratic, more egalitarian historical system than the existing one” (Wallerstein, 2014, p. 160).

Historically, the French revolution changed the structure of the modern world-system, resulting in two major geocultural changes as follows:

- (1) Sovereignty in the people.
- (2) Normality of change (Wallerstein, 2014, p. 158).

As a result, three main ideologies emerged; conservatism, liberalism and radicalism. Until the first half of the nineteenth century, conflict among ideologies dominated the ideological

map. After 1848 (social revolution and the springtime of nations) and despite the failure of these revolutions, they changed the ideological map for the next century by introducing liberalism as the center ideology. Therefore, liberal agenda was adopted by core states until World War I (WWI) (Wallerstein, 2006, pp. 61–65).

The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of two main types of bureaucratic structures which are considered anti-systemic movements; social movements and nationalist movements (Wallerstein, 2002, p. 29). The scene from 1848 to 1945 witnessed a narrow focus from each group on its goals instead of creating a common goal or coordination (Wallerstein, 2006, p. 73). Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the movements coincided with a strategy of two steps; seizing power and changing the world. After 1945, the movements seized power in many countries as socialist-democrats, communists, national liberation movements or populists (Wallerstein, 2002, pp. 30–31).

The end of World War II (WWII) marked the following two important cyclic shifts of the modern world-economy: the beginning of Kondratieff (A-phase) marked by economic expansion and the birth of the USA as sole hegemonic power (Wallerstein, 2014, p. 161). The hegemon power is able to impose its rule on the system to maximize the accumulation of capital (Wallerstein, 2011a).

Despite the economic growth, the gap between center and periphery widened (Wallerstein, 2006, p. 84) and real democratic practices remained absent. Generally, the changes did not meet the expectations and failed to transform the world (Wallerstein, 2002, p. 33).

In 1968, the world witnessed the world-revolution against the failure of traditional anti-systemic movements. The revolution represented a rejection to the American hegemony and defended the minorities' rights as prime actors (Wallerstein and Zukin, 1989, p. 431, 437). Although the revolution was suppressed, it succeeded in changing the geocultural scene, as it ended the dominance of liberalism (1848–1968) as a centrist ideology (Wallerstein, 2014, p. 164). Besides, the failure of traditional anti-systemic movements meant more difficulties to the world-system, as those movements would no longer contain their followers (Wallerstein, 2004, p. 8). Finally, the state was no longer viewed as a “mechanism of transformation” (Wallerstein, 2002, p. 34).

Post 1968, the world-system entered the Kondratieff (B-phase) for contraction. Accordingly, “the neoliberalism as theory and the Washington consensus as policy” got promoted as a solution to reduce the rising costs of production and reversing the gains achieved by the welfare state. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organization (WTO) became the tools to implement the policy (Wallerstein, 2006, p. 86).

The economic difficulties faced south glob from the 1970s onward. These made structure adjustment programs unavoidable (Wallerstein, 2006, p. 86), even for states governed by traditional anti-systemic movements, as states facing difficulties had to agree to the new set of prescriptions (neoliberalism) to get financial assistance (Wallerstein, 2014, p. 165). This led to the creation of new anti-systemic movements, as a result to the increasing economic difficulties (Wallerstein, 2014, pp. 164–165).

As the second half of the 1990s, the Washington consensus has faced many challenges. These challenges are the neo-Zapatistas in January 1994, opposing imperialism and oppression of Chiapas on the same day of North American Free Trade Agreement effectiveness. Then, in 1999, Seattle witnessed a protest movement against the WTO meeting adopting intellectual property rights treaty. The movement succeeded in blocking the treaty, spreading a new protest technique and proving opposition to neoliberalism in the Global North. Then, in January 2001, the World Social Forum (WSF) in Porto Alegre was established with a vision that another world is

possible as opposed to World Economic Forum (WEF) which believes that there is no other alternate (Wallerstein, 2014, pp. 168–170).

Finally, 2011 witnessed the eruption of various movements from Arab spring to Indignados and Occupy Wall Street. Despite the differences between those movements, they all shared the same goal, which was being against the features embedded in the current world-system. Those movements took place at a time of deep crisis of the world-system. They represented reflection to the consequences of economic hardship. They used a new effective approach in mobilization and participation. At this point, Tom Reifer referred to the interconnectedness of anti-systemic movements, highlighting the connection between the economic crisis in the 1980s and 2008. Similarly, Reifer referred to the connection of WSF and Arab Spring and Occupy. They resulted from the structure of the world-system and mobilization of critical conscious mass. The main determinants for these anti-systemic movements to turn into a global movement –transforming the current world-system– are their geographic expansion and continuity. Although those movements vary in their success, they managed to shift the main discourse from “ideological mantras of neoliberalism” to reconsidering the main features embedded in the system such as inequality and injustice (Reifer, 2013, pp. 186–187; Macpherson and Smith, 2013, pp. 367–368; Wallerstein, 2012).

For the Arab spring, Wallerstein believes that it contains two different streams. First: it is “the heir of the world-revolution 1968” and he calls it “second Arab revolt” aiming at achieving the autonomy of the Arab world, because of the failure of the first revolt (Wallerstein, 2011b, p. 1). The first revolt was led by Sharif Hussein against the Ottoman Empire in 1916. However, the Great Arab Revolt was co-opted later by colonial powers. After the independence of Arab states post-1945, their independence was co-opted mainly by the USA (Wallerstein, 2011c). Second, the geopolitical powers tried to influence the revolt, according to their own interests regardless of the aims of the revolt (Wallerstein, 2011b, pp. 1–2).

There were two main features of the current 1968. First: the influence exerted by geopolitical powers to maintain it. Besides, they are against the undemocratic behavior embedded in all power structures. Second: the revolution of the forgotten. “Forgotten” refers to those who were excluded by main organized political powers (Wallerstein, 2011b, p. 2), those who were left behind and did not benefit from the reforms (Wallerstein, 1999, p. 113) and those who were told that their demands were secondary and would be postponed until the primary demands are achieved (Wallerstein, 2011b, pp. 2–3).

3.3 Criticism

Wallerstein was criticized for viewing the capitalist system as a polarized system in the light of the improved quality of life during the past decades in the Global South and the evidence of increasing fortunes in Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. However, this should be understood in the frame of multi-polarity and diminishing power of the USA. Finally, there is evidence of major capital concentration in the North (El-Ojeili, 2015, pp. 686–689). It is worth noting that although trends of global inequality have declined since 2000, this was mainly due to the increasing fortune in India and China, which reduced the gap between north and south. At the same time, inequality continues to rise within states (Bourguignon, 2016). The same is applicable for the extreme poverty rate; the decline was due to the improvement achieved in East Asia and the Pacific while it remained high in Sub-Sahara (The World Bank, 2016). However, this trend will be reversed this year because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the decline in oil prices. The World Bank estimated the extreme poverty rate to rise by 0.3% to 0.7% to around 9% in 2020 (The World Bank, 2020). In this regard, Wade expressed his suspension stating that as follows:

“The World Bank’s poverty numbers are subject to a large margin of error, are probably biased downward, and probably make the trend look rosier than it really is” (Wade, 2004, p. 581). The new facts from COVID-19 proved the validity of Wallerstein’s assumption regarding the polarization of the world-economy. This goes in alignment with what the WEF statement that the pandemic “has had a devastating impact on poverty levels and inequality” (Goldin and Muggah, 2020), which is one of the main concerns of the study.

The researcher believes that the main problem with Wallerstein’s analysis is the loose definition of main concepts such as “anti-systemic movements” and “forgotten.” The problems are identifying the anti-systemic movements by their goals only, although they have various forms and results, besides, neglecting what Bayart called “historicity of the situations” in the discourse of Arab spring (Bayart, 2013, p. 15). This stemmed from Wallerstein’s focus on totalities. This study attempts to overcome this by analyzing the historicity of the Egyptian case in light of the general features of anti-systemic movements. The same applies to Wallerstein’s broad definition of the “forgotten.” This study attempts to overcome this weakness by identifying the main groups participating in the revolution and tracing how their demands were affected.

4. The political economy of Egypt

4.1 Historical background

We need to notice that Wallerstein listed Egypt in the category of semi-periphery (Wallerstein, 1976, p. 465).

The economic transformations in Egypt are closely linked to the world-economic system. Mohamed Ali’s reign succeeded in achieving growth and changing the structure of the economy, benefiting from the weakness of the Ottoman empire and the results of Napoleonic wars, which absorbed the capital surplus internally in Europe (Amin, 2012, pp. 123–125). Afterward on, Ali’s system was dismantled by the convention between the Ottoman Empire and the European powers to end his monopoly system and to open the way for free trade in 1840. Afterward, the western capitalists dominated and the local industry ended (Clawson, 2014).

Ali’s successors were indebted, despite of the availability of resources. Afterward on, the European creditors- controlled Egypt’s finance. In 1882, the British occupation aggravated the situation. Meanwhile, Europe witnessed a capital surplus (Amin, 2012, pp. 22–33). For the following 40 years, the occupation subjected Egypt to its model of capital accumulation (Amin, 2011a).

Despite the global recession during the interwar period, Egypt was able to pay its debt and turn into a creditor. In addition, Egypt was able to establish some industries. This shall be understood in light of power shifts and economic difficulties in the northern states. After WWII, the USA. sought to the extent its influence on the region (Amin, 2012, pp. 132–137). Concurrently, the USA made a concession to the anti-colonial movements which, according to Wallerstein, was driven by its desire to contain and moderate its revolutionary impact to accept the interstate system (Wallerstein, 2017). During the following years, the Free Officers Movement emerged and launched the Egyptian revolution of 1952.

4.2 Nasser era (1956–1970)

His policies represented a shift in the economic structure in terms of industrialization and investment (Amin, 2012, pp. 50–51). Nasser adopted “Arab socialism” which combined pan-Arabism and state capitalism including an expanding role for the public sector, nationalization, redistribution policies and subsidies (Ide, 2015, pp. 2–8). Globally, Egypt could benefit from the presence of two poles in terms of borrowing without restricting its movement (Thabet, 1992, p. 154).

The situation changed from 1965 to 1970, as the external market of the third world drew major attention, due to the economic challenges facing the USA. Furthermore, the relation between the two poles moved from confrontation to détente, which limited the benefits that Egypt gained before (Amin, 2012, pp. 144–152). The USA stopped its food aid shipments from 1967 to 1974 channeled through the American public law 480 (Blue, 1983, p. 2). This tool was used by the USA to redirect the Egyptian policy according to its interest, benefiting from its critical economic situation (Amin, 2012, p. 145).

4.3 Sadat era (1970–1981)

Analysts debated the beginning of counter-transformation whether it was in 1965 (the past year of the five-year plan) or in 1967 (war with Israel) due to the pressure that faced the regime. Others believed that transformation was latent in Abdel-Nasser's regime, because of the inefficiency of the development strategy. The transformation was later deepened by Sadat (Thabet, 1992, pp. 149–150).

After the October 6, 1973 war, the need for economic restructuring became urgent, due to economic deterioration. Therefore, Sadat adopted the October Working Paper 1974 (Infitah), which marked a new era of economic liberalization (Nagarajan, 2013, pp. 26–27). His policies represented a shift toward the western camp, especially the USA (Aoude, 2012, p. 321).

During the first five years of the Sadat era, debt increased without changing the economic structure or improving economic growth. This was due to opening the door for imports, which surpassed exports and the lack of foreign reserves. The system filled the gap by external borrowing. In 1975, Egypt failed to pay its short-term debt; while Gulf states reduced their financial support. The USA used this crisis to pressure Egypt to pursue a peace treaty with Israel and to start negotiation with IMF (Amin, 2012, pp. 70–77).

On January 17, 1977, the government reduced subsidy for necessities to bring the country along with the IMF terms, which invoked a food riot for two days leaving 79 dead. Finally, the government restored the subsidy (McCauley, 1979, p. 171). From 1977 until the end of the Sadat era, Egypt enjoyed a period of economic growth, due to increasing oil prices and remittance. However, the borrowing rate increased, which proved that the debt rate in Egypt was inseparable from the world-system (Amin, 2012, pp. 80–81, 100–101). Meanwhile, the USA became the largest lender to Egypt; the aid had political importance that surpassed its economic one. The signing of the peace treaty with Israel under American mediation was evidence of the use of aid to pursue political interests, (Aulas, 1982).

In assessing the Infitah policy, the Egyptian economy was transformed to services. Meanwhile, the number of agents to foreign capital increased drastically. The USA got the largest benefit from Infitah. Kandil stated that the American influence during the 1970s to eliminate industrialization surpassed the one exerted by European powers during Ali's era. The change in the economic structure affected social relations. That is, while Nasser's support base was formed from fragments of the middle class, Sadat's support base formed from traditional capitalists and *nouveau riche*; mostly poor immigrated to Gulf who invested their money in Egypt. This resulted in the parasitic bourgeoisie investing their money in activities of fast profits with no real benefits to the Egyptian economy (Kandil, 2012, p. 203, 206). Infitah also led to enhancing the relation between businessmen and the political elite and increased inequalities (Fergany, p. 167).

4.4 Mubarak era (1981–2011)

Before 1986, the economic features represented a continuation of Sadat, because of economic growth. The first crisis facing the regime was in 1986, due to the fall of oil prices, which led to a budget deficit (Amin, 2012, pp. 107–108) and the limited funding access, due to recession

in lending states. In this context, Egypt resorted to the IMF in May 1987 to get debt repayment rescheduling, but it was stopped with only half of the fund dispersed, due to the inability to reduce government expenditures because of its impact on political stability (Nagarajan, 2013, pp. 29–30).

In 1988/1989, the international financing institutions (IFIs) exerted coordinated pressure along with the USA on Egypt to reach an agreement with IMF through using the aid as a tool of influence (Fergany, pp. 215–216).

In 1990, the economy reached a critical level; debt reached US\$11,4bn, investment and gross domestic product declined. Egypt approached Paris club creditors to get debt relief; it was approved on condition to continue applying structural adjustment program (Korayem, 1997, pp. 1–3). Meanwhile, the second Gulf war broke out, which represented an opportunity to conclude the agreements. In return to Egypt's efforts, it got debt easing, external assistance and write off military debt to the USA. In May 1991, Egypt signed agreements with the IMF and the World Bank (Fergany, pp. 216–217).

While on the short run, the program succeeded in “targeted fiscal parameters,” it did not create sustainable growth (Nagarajan, 2013, p. 30). The program led to “concentrate public funds into different, but fewer hands. The state has turned resources away from agriculture, industry and the underlying problems of training and employment. It now subsidizes financiers instead of factories, speculators instead of schools [. . .] Lending the pack of those who have good connections are about two dozen conglomerates [. . .] They enjoy powerful monopolies or oligopolies as exclusive agents for goods and services of western-based transnationals [. . .] These conglomerates produced goods and services affordable to just a small fraction of Egypt's population” (Mitchell, 1999, pp. 31–32).

At the beginning of the 2000s, the economy faced major economic difficulties and a huge deficit, meanwhile, the USA war against Iraq in 2003 represented an opportunity through increasing oil prices and Suez Canal revenue (Nagarajan, 2013, p. 33). This proved that the economic growth was unsustainable and dependent on external factors. In 2004, the IMF urged Egypt to accelerate structural adjustments. Egypt responded by further liberalization (Dahi, 2012, p. 47). In the same year, the United States Agency for International Development evaluation report assessing privatization in Egypt referred to the huge cost of not privatizing, stating that it would add an unaffordable deficit to the budget and urging Egypt to move toward an aggressive privatization program (King *et al.*, 2004, p. 1, 16). In July 2004, Nazif's businessmen government was appointed, which accelerated the neoliberal economic agenda. The alliance between the state and businessmen elite became institutionalized (Austin-Holmes, 2012, p. 395). The businessmen who became members in the parliament increased from 8 in 1995 to 150 in the 2005 election (Joya, 2011, p. 370). Legislations were used as a tool to enhance private capital; meanwhile, burdens increased on the middle class and the poor. Sample burdens were income tax law, custom tariffs (El-Naggar, 2009, pp. 36–41) and unified labor law, which allowed termination of the temporary contract unilaterally to attract foreign investment (Beinin, 2012, p. 4). The foreign investment tripled from 2004 to 2007, which made the west relax the pressure of democratization. According to Kandil, it is a typical function performed by the capitalist in the peripheries *vis-à-vis* the core (Kandil, 2012, p. 209). Privatization went in leaps and bounds, in the fiscal year 2006/2007, the state privatized assets worth US\$5,34bn, which surpass the privatizing proceeds during 10 years before Nazif assumed power (Beissinger *et al.*, 2015, p. 15). The policy affected the urban poor and the middle class (Aoude, 2012, p. 323). The conditions were deteriorating for ordinary Egyptians; people struggled to get access to clean water and baladi bread (Mahdi and Marfleet, 2009, pp. 2–3). Meanwhile, big businesses, conglomerates and families became part of the Mubarak regime,

especially toward its end; playing the role of a political actor either formally or informally. They accessed the state resources, symbolizing unholy marriage between power and wealth (Adly, 2014, p. 5).

The impact of the global financial crisis hit the Egyptian economy, since mid-2008, reversing the boost in economic indicators achieved since 2004 (Radwan, 2009, pp. 3–4). Globally, the crisis led to moving to a direct role of the government in the production even in core states (Wallerstein, 2008). Despite the growing discontent in Egyptian streets, who were referred to as victims of neoliberalism (contemporary capitalism), the IFIs praised Egypt for its economic reforms (Maher, 2011).

Since 2004, the discontent induced a revival to street politics, which led to the birth of Kifaya and many groups; student, youth, university professors, workers and artists for change and the people campaign for change (Joya, 2011, pp. 368–369). In 2005, following the parliamentary election, the judges club formulated an investigative committee under the allegation of widespread fraud (Al-Hajjaji, 2016, pp. 30–31). In 2010, the opposition boycotted the parliamentary election after widespread fraud in the first round (Abd-rabou, 2012, p. 208). The discontent continued till the wake of the revolution, when the April 6 Youth Movement, We Are All Khalid Said Facebook Group, National Association for Change among others, called for the revolution (Joya, 2011, pp. 368–369).

5. The Egyptian revolution as anti-systemic movement

This section analyzes the Egyptian revolution as an anti-systemic movement. While Wallerstein identified anti-systemic movements based on their goals, the researcher added other features, concluded by previous studies on anti-systemic movements (Wallerstein, 2011b; Reifer, 2013; Macpherson and Smith, 2013) as follows.

5.1 *The form of mobilization*

The nature of the technology used for mobilization and during the revolution, which was called “liberation technology” (Reifer, 2013, p. 189), was reflected on its main features; it was horizontal and leaderless. It represented an alternate form of democratic non-violent social organization (Maher, 2011), aiming at occupying public spaces. Tahrir square was an “autonomous space” for exchanging ideas and political debate freely, creating an “alternate public sphere” and equal “political community.” Therefore, “Tahrir square will be remembered as a space of freedom where equality and democracy was lived” (van de Sande, 2013, pp. 234–236). It represented a challenge to traditional opposition mechanisms and a rejection to the hierarchal system.

5.2 *Revolution of the forgotten*

Wallerstein believed that the “forgotten” are considered social minorities. They represented a list of people, conscious of their status with different relations to the power structure, hence, their positions varies (Wallerstein, 2011b, pp. 2–3). They are unified by being affected negatively by neoliberalism. By applying this concept to the Egyptian context, this study discovered that the neoliberal economic policies have affected a list of the forgotten, who led the way to the revolution, as explained below.

5.2.1 Middle class. During the 1950s and 1960s, the Egyptian middle class was created by the state’s policies and development programs, which led to increasing its number. Starting the 1970’s onward, the situation has changed as a result to state policies, which started by Infitah, then structural adjustment, leading to dismantling, impoverishment and marginalization of this class. The state moved from using capital accumulation for economic and social development policies to using its rentier resources for the service of foreign, Arab

and local capital accompanied with relentless efforts to integrate the Egyptian economy, within the world capitalist economy (Hassan, 2016, pp. 133–134, 352).

By the 2000s, despite the accelerating rate of economic growth, the standard conditions of the middle class deteriorated continuously; per capita income decreased by 7% from 2000 to 2006. The growing inequalities left the middle class in severe deprivation (Kandil, 2012, pp. 210–211). The vigorous privatization program, applied since 2004, forced the middle class to search for alternates to fulfill its needs away from deteriorating state services in education and health. Meanwhile, public sector employment decreased by 10% from 2000 to 2010 (Beissinger *et al.*, 2015, pp. 15–16). Consequently, the middle class eroded from 65% to 58% from 2000 to 2008 to the lower class according to the world value survey (Diwan, 2013, pp. 1350004–11). Analysts argued that the revolts “were led by middle class elements that defected from authoritarian coalitions and evolved into champions of change, driven by the lack of opportunities for socioeconomic advancement and anger about rising perceived inequalities” (Diwan and Galal, 2016, p. 2).

5.2.2 Youth. The revolution started by a group of youth who spent most of their life under neoliberal capitalism (Hanieh, 2011b, p. 28). The context created main challenges facing youth in the transition to adulthood; poverty and unemployment, unequal access to education, lack of housing and transportation, lack of political participation and health problems (United Nations Development Program and Institute of National Planning, 2010, pp. 4–12). Despite the economic growth before the revolution, it was not translated into job creation and resulted in jobless growth (El-Meehy, 2014, p. 13). Although youth unemployment dropped from 16.9% in 2006 to 16.7% in 2009, according to standard definition, it increased from 19.1% in 2006 to 22.6% in 2009 as a youth became discouraged to seek a job. This led to the late start of independent life which means being dependent on their families. This was due to the long waiting period to get a job, consequently, affording housing and marriage expenses (United Nations Development Program and Institute of National Planning, 2010, pp. 152–154, 4). New comers were faced by challenges like nepotism. They had to move to either the limited opportunities provided by the private sector or informal ones (Diwan, 2013, pp. 1350004–9).

At the same time, this generation was different from the previous one in terms of exposure to the outside world and urbanization (The Economist, 2010, p. 2). In 2010, 22.6 million Egyptians—mostly youth—had access to the internet (Aly, 2012, p. 30).

The revolutionary youth posit themselves on the left without doing this consciously. They rejected persistent inequality and poverty and called for social justice (Amin, 2011b, p. 17). The revolution’s slogan reflected this reality as follows: “Bread, freedom, social justice and human dignity.” While others raised direct messages such as “USA: support the people not the tyrant,” “USA. aid killed our people” (Austin-Holmes, 2011) and “The USA do not interfere” (State Information Service, 2014). To elaborate, the revolution was triggered “by courageous young people who were protesting against the arbitrary power of the powerful locally, nationally, internationally. In this sense, it was anti-imperialist, anti-exploitation and profoundly egalitarian” (Wallerstein, 2013c).

5.2.3 Labor. Labor movements represented a struggle “against the effort of USA Government and IFIs to impose a new regime of capital accumulation on the region, regulated by the policy prescriptions of the neoliberal Washington consensus” (Beinin, 2016, p. 6).

There were more than 3,400 collective actions from 2004 to 2010 involving from 2 to 4 million workers, which was unprecedented in Egypt. Their demands were related to “job security, non-fulfillment of contractual obligations before or after privatization of a public sector firm and delayed or reduced payment of fringe benefits, bonuses or profit shares in both public and private sector firms” (Beinin, 2016, p. 9). The growing culture of protest

eroded the regime's legitimacy during the decade before the revolution (Beinin and Duboc, 2015, pp. 3–4).

Laborers joined the revolution at the beginning as individuals. Then, they moved the revolution to the workplaces paralyzing the state economy. Protest rose from 20 to 65, from February 8 to 11, 2011 (Abdalla, 2012, p. 89). Although the exact weight of labor strikes in Mubarak stepping down was uncertain, the economic loss caused by these strikes “was one of the most important factors” accelerating the decision (Beinin and Duboc, 2015, p. 9).

To conclude, after 1952, the regime consolidated its power though trading off political loyalty for development. The regime combined authoritarian rule with distributive mechanisms. This social contract began to erode by the mid-1970s (Dahi, 2012, pp. 48–49). Mubarak continued to reshape the social contract to a one with a capitalist elite base instead of masses, which El-Haddad called “unsocial social contract,” as it excluded a growing number of societal groups from the contract's gain (El-Haddad, 2020, pp. 2–3).

The Egyptian revolution was a result to the change in the world-system and neoliberalism (contemporary capitalism). The forgotten are victims of neoliberalism, as their conditions deteriorated as a result to their state position in the world economic structure. Furthermore, this created low wage jobs for capitalist production and moved toward privatization.

5.3 Seeking to achieve autonomy

As the revolution sought to achieve autonomy, it triggered a counteraction both internally and externally.

Internally, the revolution started with thousands on January 25, 2011, and the numbers reached millions after few days. As the first day, repression was used against the protestors leaving three dead and then more repressive measures were used on January 28, 2011. On the following day, Mubarak delivered his first speech which represented a concession by the regime; however, it failed to tame the revolts. Then, the following days witnessed the combination of the two strategies (Amnesty International, 2011, pp. 17–19). The different strategies used by the regime represented a counteraction to contain the revolution.

Globally, Wallerstein indicated that in the modern world-economy, the states in the interstate system are the basic component of the world-economy. The strong states pressure the weak ones to achieve their interests by interfering in their affairs to maintain their positions in their interstate system (Wallerstein, 2006, p. 24, 55). As the Arab revolt aimed at achieving autonomy, as it represented the “second Arab revolt” and the “heir of the world-revolution 1968,” the main geopolitical powers globally and regionally tried to influence it according to their interests. The problem with the major geopolitical powers was “how to best distract attention and advance their own interest amidst the turmoil” (Wallerstein, 2011b, p. 1, 3). This applied to the Egyptian case, where different geopolitical actors sought to pursue their interests, away from the demands of the revolution. In this regard, there were three main groups as follows:

- (1) First: states perceived the revolution as a threat and tried to contain it, according to the revolution development.

Despite the western alleged support to democracy, the USA. witnessed a split in voices inside the White House of in dealing with the events in Egypt. These voices had expressed their concerns over abandoning a strategic ally for 30 years, fear of the Iranian model and power vacuum on one side and failure to support basic rights which protestors called for, on the other (Zaki, 2016). Then, once Mubarak was losing power, the USA started speaking about an orderly transition which would not result in a real change in its relation with Egypt (Al-Minshawy, 2013). In the same vein, the European Union (EU) was reluctant to

support the Egyptian revolution, till Obama stated firmly on February 2, 2011, that the transition should start immediately. Afterward, the EU stance during the transition period seemed dependent on the USA (Isaac, 2014, p. 156).

The USA position stemmed from its interest to maintain the status-quo. It defended autocratic systems in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region for several reasons. First, this guaranteed oil supplies, which is crucial for its position as a dominate power in the world-system. Second, there were concerned about establishing a democratic system in Egypt, which runs the risk of replicating the model in the oil-rich country. The third concern was preserving Israel's security (Hanieh, 2011b, pp. 25–27). Similarly, the EU recognized Egypt's weight in the region, especially regarding the Palestine-Israel conflict and its importance as an energy supplier and to the EU's security (Isaac, 2014, p. 155).

During the transition period, the USA maintained a stable relation with the Supreme Council of Armed Forces, despite the tension over civil society funding. The USA continued its military aid, in order not to “alienate” them (Austin-Holmes, 2011). While the EU allocated to the whole MENA region €7bn during the period (2011–2013), it postponed its implementation to the end of 2013. This was criticized due to both the meager amount and wait-and-see approach (Isaac, 2014, p. 156).

Moreover, during the transition period, Group of Eight pledged a financial package with US\$20bn to Egypt and Tunisia in collaboration with major IFIs (Irish and Baker, 2011). The aid aimed to link Egypt to the capitalist world. It was “a sustained effort to restrain the revolution within the bounds of an “orderly transition” (Hanieh, 2011a, p. 30).

(2) Second: states perceived the revolution as a threat and opposed it.

Both Israel and Saudi Arabia expressed their support o Mubarak while Israel aimed at maintaining stability and peace with Egypt, which lasted for the past 30 years (Stoil, 2011) Saudi king Abdullah Ben Abdulaziz expressed his support to Mubarak. The Saudi king warned Obama on 29th January, during a phone call, against halting aid to pressure Mubarak to step down, expressing the Saudi willingness to replace the American aid in that case (Reuters, 2011). Saudi Arabia wanted to maintain stability in Egypt as Mubarak's regime was strategical.

During the transition period, Egypt's relation with both states deteriorated. For Israel, the attack on the Israeli embassy in Cairo marked a serious step. In this context, the Israeli defense minister stressed that “tensions with Turkey and Egypt increase the political isolation of Israel” (Ravid, 2011). Besides, there were concerns over the repetitive explosion of the gas pipeline to Israel. Here, the USA played a strategic role, maintaining the main strategic pillars between the two states during the transition period and using the aid to Egypt as a tool (Rieff, 2011). Since 2012, the USA linked the aid to Egypt to fulfilling its obligation under the 1979 peace treaty (Sharp, 2020, p. 3).

On the Saudi side, the tension between the two states accumulated when the Saudi embassy in Cairo closed over Egyptian protests for arresting an Egyptian activist in Saudi Arabia. This highlighted the concern over the violation of the Egyptian worker's rights. The situation was quickly maintained to stabilize the relation with Saudi Arabia, which is considered the main source of remittance and aid (Fahim, 2012). Afterward, and within less than one month from the embassy event, Saudi Arabia provided Egypt with US\$500m as aid plus a US\$1bn deposit in the Central Bank (Reuters, 2012).

(3) Third: states viewed the revolution as an opportunity to pursue their interest.

Iran, Turkey and Qatar viewed the Egyptian revolution as an opportunity to expand their regional influence, and to contain the new Egyptian regime which may emerge as a

competitor. For Iran, it wanted to dominate the revolution calling it an “Islamic liberation movement,” that would liberate Middle East from the USA and Israel (BBC, 2011). After the revolution, Iran fixed its relation with the new regime aiming at isolating Israel and breaking the international blockade.

The same venue was followed by Turkey whose Prime Minister (PM) pursued Mubarak to transfer power to the interim government (BBC, 2011). After the revolution, the Turkish PM visited Egypt accompanied with 235 businessmen and six ministers and pursued Egypt to follow the Turkish model (DW, 2011). The Turkish response stemmed from “neo-Ottomanism,” which marks the geostrategic vision to become a regional power (Taşpınar, 2008, p. 3).

Finally, Qatar supported the Egyptian revolution and improved its relation with Egypt in the post-Mubarak era (Al-Manawi, 2013). The Qatari position was in line with its interest in playing a bigger role. After the revolution, Qatar used Aljazeera to support the Muslim brotherhood to gain influence in Egypt (Al-Qassemi, 2012). Besides, Qatar increased its aid, which was motivated by its desire to gain a foothold in Egypt (Abi-Habib and Abdellatif, 2013).

Although the above-mentioned groups varied in their response to the Egyptian revolution, they all tried to influence the revolution according to their own interests, regardless of revolution demands.

6. Conclusion

The Egyptian revolution presented itself as an anti-systemic movement. Given the reasons embedded in the analysis of the Egyptian revolution, anti-systemic movements have the potential of spreading in different places and times. The common feature is that they all are pursuing a different world, an egalitarian and a democratic world versus the capitalist world-system. During 2019, leaders of Algeria, Lebanon, Iraq and Sudan left their position under protests pressure while in Chile and Ecuador Governments made some concessions. Elsewhere in India, Hong Kong, France and Spain masses poured into the streets. Their demand ranged from real democracy, a more egalitarian system and anti-colonization (France 24, 2019). More recently, the global spread of “black Lives Matter” 2020, and the destruction of the colonial figure statues in the UK, New Zealand, Belgium, Australia and the USA have reflected anger against exploitation and imperialism.

The world-economy is in crisis, manifested by the unemployment rate which led to shrinking the demand, therefore threatening capital accumulation (Wallerstein, 2016). As we are amid a structure crisis, Wallerstein found out three “imponderables” that can lead to uncertain consequences during the systemic transition to a new system and associated with the historical development of the world-system, namely, climate change, pandemics and nuclear warfare (Wallerstein, 2013b). The current COVID-19 pandemic is aggravating the crisis, which is crystallized in the oil negative price. The collapse in the demand of strategic commodity will lead to rearranging the world-economy (Mulder and Tooze, 2020). Other consequences of the crisis included a reduction of working hours by 14% during the second quarter of 2020 (UN News, 2020) and threatening 1.6 billion workers in the informal sector of losing their sources of income (ILO, 2020). A recent study discovered that the effect of neoliberal economic policies weakened the capacity to fight the pandemic in the USA, Spain and Italy (Navarro, 2020, p. 271). From 71 to 100 million will live in extreme poverty (less than US\$1.90) while the UN estimates predict that 490 million will live in poverty, which is defined as lack of basics (The Economist, 2020a).

The pandemic also brought to the fore the controversial issue of priorities between the Swedish model prioritizing economic growth and supported by the right and the New-

Zealanders one prioritizing people life and supported by the left (The Economist, 2020b). The debate reflects more abstract facts between a more hierarchical polarized or horizontal and egalitarian world. The debate extended to the current tension between the EU and AstraZeneca over the COVID-19 vaccine, which is described as a vaccine war. The tension was exacerbated when it comes to vaccine distribution, which reflected the entrenched inequality and the moral crisis of the world system.

It is very likely that the coming period will witness waves of anti-systemic movements, which will spread everywhere.

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Corresponding author

Amany Abdellatif Osman can be contacted at: amany.alateef@gmail.com