

# **The Revolt of the Marginalized**

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Received Date: February 25, 2013

Accepted Date: March 9, 2013

## **Abstract**

This article deals primarily with some of major manifestation of marginalization as the main motivating force in revolutionary movement in the Arab world called "the Arab Spring" by west media.

Author depart from this point that the neo-liberal policies imposed upon some leading Arab Nations such as Egypt, Tunisia, Margo, Yemen, by the United States, International Monetary Fund (IFM), and World Bank is immediate cause of uprising in the Arab world. Neo-liberal "reforms" by aggravating living condition of wide masses of peoples, intensification of workers exploitation, vast youth unemployment, and some other problems ignited revolts, but the revolutionary movements have deeper grievances which turns to other manifestation of marginalization of this nations as the peripheries of world monopoly capitalism.

Neo-liberal reforms in Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria and some other Arab states, which in periphery states involves super exploitation and required governments to relinquish the welfare state policies created situation which moved people against deep economic, political and social injustice.

**Keywords:** Marginalization, Neo-liberal Reforms, Super Exploitation, Welfare State Demise, Youth Bulge, Culturalism, Political Islam.

## **Introduction**

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Over the course of one year the Arab nations has thrown into tremendous turbulence unprecedented since 1950s. A huge wave of revolutionary movements swept the Arab world in 2011. this wave of uprising have toppled dictators in Tunisia and Egypt, overthrew Qadafi with civil war, fuelled bloody confront in Syria, Bahrain and Yemen, Jordon, Morocco and Oman and finally drawn protesters onto the streets of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Aside Losses of life, that yet goes on, the costs to GDP, based on data from the international Monetary fund, amounts to US \$20/56 billion in ten month of 2011, while the costs of public finance exceeds US \$28 billion over ten years of that years (Geopolicity, 2011, VII).

Ironically the international organizations as IMF, World Bank, as well as the G8 that have been invoking the Arab States to pursue neoliberal policies as sole way of producing prosperity, now are studying ways of rising funds to rescue the victims of neo-liberal policies and save them from fall in their "Spring" (Ibid). How those stubborn promoters of neo-liberal policies for undeveloped countries now themselves are trapped by same policies could help victims of these policies nobody knows. Up to now, there has been not any operational help from of them.

In this essay we try to introduce political economy as a means to approach origin of "The Arab Awakening". The roles that played by neo-liberal policies pursued by regimes in Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Yemen, Morocco, and the like in past decades produced results that ignited deep root grievances to flame, and long delayed political demands to come fore.

What Western media drawing on Eastern Europe precedent refers to it as "Arab Spring", and Arab people referring to their former revival movements calls it "Arab Awakening" differs, of course, from one country to another. However, there are some important features which are common among them all; they are all victims of a marginalization that impose on them by world imperial powers representing world monopoly capitalism. They all suffer from various aspect of marginalization as periphery of world capitalist centers. Doomed to underdevelopment and

poverty in the world capitalist division of work and distribution of wealth, subjected to degradation of unrepresentative governments, injured by humiliation from Israelis successive aggressions, the Arab people are at the outmost limit of marginalization in the world capitalist periphery. They are the most depreciated of "the %99". So I call the current uprising in the Arab world the revolt of the marginalized. Situation is somehow different in oil rich countries which the considerable wealth within the governments reach allows rulers to alleviate deprivations through rentiering operations and to console people.

Here I am going to examine one of the main roots of revolutionary upheavals in the forerunner Arab nations as Egypt and Tunisia with reference to their main source of recent mass discontent resulting from pursuing neo-liberal policies advocated by United States, IMF and World Bank. What follows here, mainly about Egypt and Tunisia, holds more or less about other uprising nations in Arab world.

### **Economy and Uprising**

Of course there are a number of reasons which may be considered as sources of recent turbulence and turmoil in Arab world. Among various factors that counts as roots of these upheavals there is one which many analysts has been drawing upon it and asserted its single importance. This factor is at the same time, core of other manifestation of marginalization imposed on periphery by world capitalist centers. It relates, more truly to recent developments in the world monopoly capitalism in its new phase of crisis in center and transfer of its consequences to vulnerable periphery nations.

Professor Rodney Wilson of Durham University and an expert on Middle East in his analysis believes that economic troubles are main roots of the "Arab Spring" (Wilson, 2011, 49). Though many in West admit this approach, but western ideological system embarked on propaganda that economic failures in Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Yemen and other Arab countries was due to inefficient state apparatus and corruption, or in fact, what they call "bad" capitalism, not neoliberal policies that Mubarak

and Ben Ali were its most heedful enforcers (Maher, 2011). Since the death of Gamal Abdel Nasser, Egypt has embarked on a process of full-fledged neo-liberalization. After that answer Sadat signed his famous peace treaty with Israel in 1978, United States opened its economic doors to Egypt and Egypt absorbed to within the United States imperial system. Anwar Sadat commenced a policy of *Infitah* that set motion Egypt's neoliberal transformation and tied its economy to international capital, a process that was accelerated by Mubarak. When Egyptian debt crisis of 1982-1990 forced it to go to multinational Paris Club to restructure its debt, the International Monetary Fund imposed a neo-liberal structural adjustment program as a condition for continuing flow of credit. The international Monetary fund also forced the government to cut spending on social services, relax price control, cut subsidies, deregulate and privatize industries, and liberalize capital flow. Mubarak neo-liberal state took down social protections, privatized Egypt health care system and other social services along with many state owned industries, food subsidies were reduced by more than five percent.

"The Greater Middle East Initiative", which has been introduced by President Bush administration, aimed at integrating the Middle East and North Africa states into the world capitalist market and American imperial system more and more. The Greater Middle East Initiative is a set of economic and political initiative and policies with ambitious objectives and grandiose claims. One component of this plan is the Middle East partnership initiative, with four "Pillars" related to economic, education, politics and women. At core of the Middle East partnership Initiative, which grants a lot of rhetoric to democracy building, lays a series of bi-lateral free trade agreements between the United States and governments in the region (Canland, 2007).

The rhetoric concerning democracy building is, in fact an ideological cover for United States' "initiative" not only open the Arab markets but also change commercial law in member states including Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Yemen, Lebanon, Qatar, Oman and Kuwait (Canland, 2007).

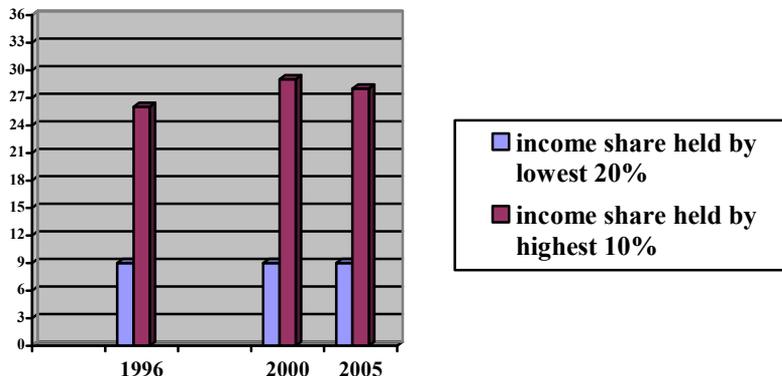
### **Socio-Economic Troubles**

Neo-liberal "reformism" was not some pure economic measures. What made it a disaster is its social effects that turn to its neo-liberal nature. Neo-liberal policies helped some economic indicators to grow considerably. In Egypt and Tunisia, the two forerunner countries in uprising, economic growth rate was 5 percent per annum (Wilson, 2011, 49). This rate of growth, tough is low with comparison to China and India, but well above European and many African and Asian countries. In Egypt, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) rose about fourfold between 1981 and 2006 (Maher, 2011). How, then, many say the primary reason for protests that topped the Arab dictators was an economic one (International Business Times, 2011)?

Neo-liberal reconstruction had wide-ranging implication for lower classes. In the Arab countries it meant longer hours jobs, less job stability, lower social services for workers, while western financiers extracted vast wealth from Egyptian and Tunisian economic growth. The groups that benefited most were the domestic oligarchy that included many members of the army and other segments of state capitalist class.

However, the main part of population, wide mass of people, not benefited from this economic growth. Instead, this growth deteriorated social relation, because entailed severe inequalities in many aspects of life. Chart 1 (below) shows incomes share in Egypt 1996, 2000 and 2005. As the Chart demonstrates there is a wide gap between 20 percent lowest income share and 10 percent highest income share.

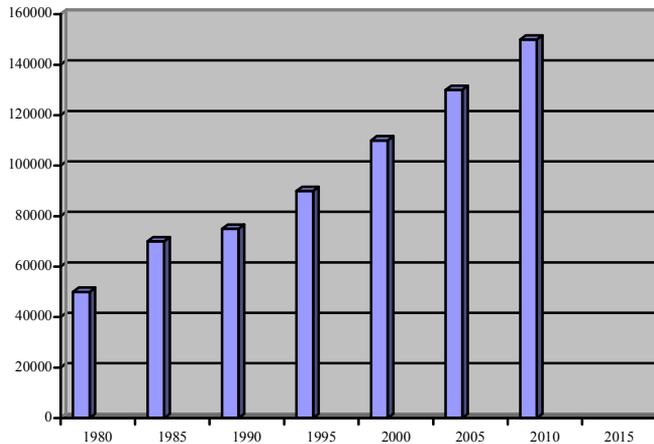
**Chart 1: Incomes Shares, Egypt-Top 20 Percent and Bottom 10 Percent, 1996-2005**



Source: World Bank: [Http://web.lexis-nexis.com/statuniv](http://web.lexis-nexis.com/statuniv).

The working class suffered more severely. Despite increase in production and wealth, real wages did not rise in tandem, and in many cases actually declined. Minimum wage has remained unchanged for twenty-six years. Neo-liberal programs served to concentrate the countries new wealth in the hands of the richest. So the gap between the reach and poor has widened more and more. Only a small minority, with political connection (rentiers) were benefiting from economic growth. In contrast to this minority not only the poor classes, but also middle classes were being stamped on. The private sector which emerged through noe-liberal reforms exhibited the worst feature of "crony capitalism". A small member of business, a group that benefiting official favoritism could grow in this periphery part of the world monopoly-financial capitalism. This "corrupt" capitalism could not expand employment opportunity for a growing population.

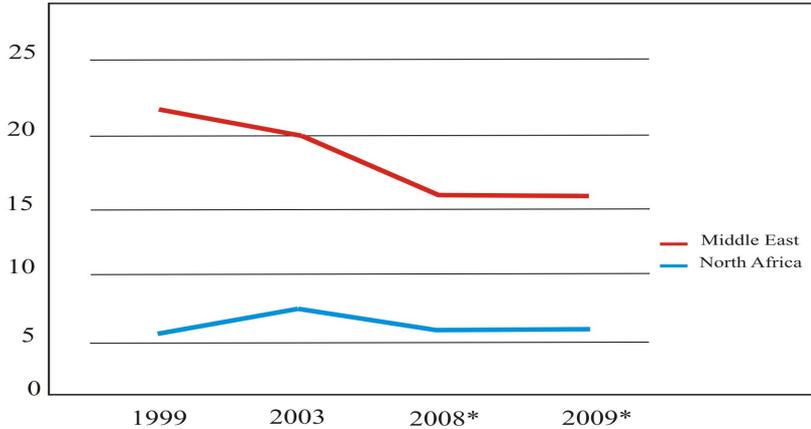
**Chart 2: A rapidly growing population and labor force in MENA labor force 1980-2010 (in millions)**



**Source: ILO Department of Statistics. Data base of labor statistics 2011**

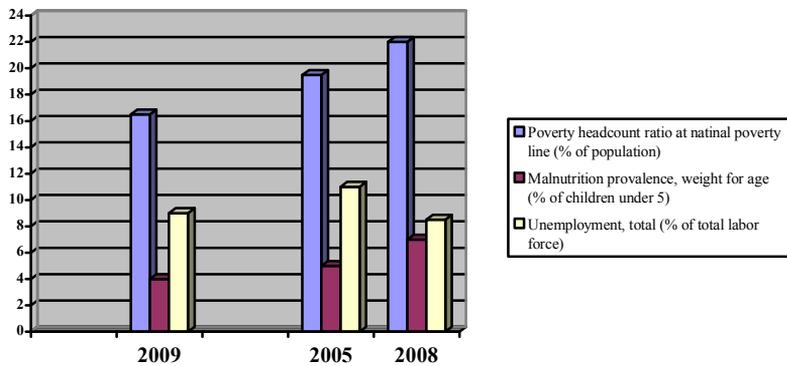
As chart 2 demonstrates labor force in the Middle East and North Africa growing rather rapidly. While employment opportunity growing moderately and was lagging. This lagging meant growing working poverty. Chart 3 shows workers share in total employment. As this chart shows working's poverty share in total employment in Middle East and North Africa declines rather rapidly.

**Chart 3: Working Poverty (1.25 US \$ a day) Share in Total Employment**



Source: Employment Policy Department- ILO

In Egypt and Tunisia with high marks on economic "reforms", relatively rapid growth and marked achievements in macro-economic areas, as chart 3 demonstrates, poverty, unemployment and malnutrition ranked particularly high. So people were right to ask government: where has the 7% growth gone?

**Chart 4: Poverty, Unemployment, and Malnutrition in Egypt, 2000-2008**

**Source:** World Bank, [Http://web.lexis-nexis.com](http://web.lexis-nexis.com)

As has been said economic growth in Middle East and North Africa was not a Job producing growth and there were not any reasonable proportionality between gross Domestic Production (GDP) growth and employment growth.

### **Demographic change and employment challenges**

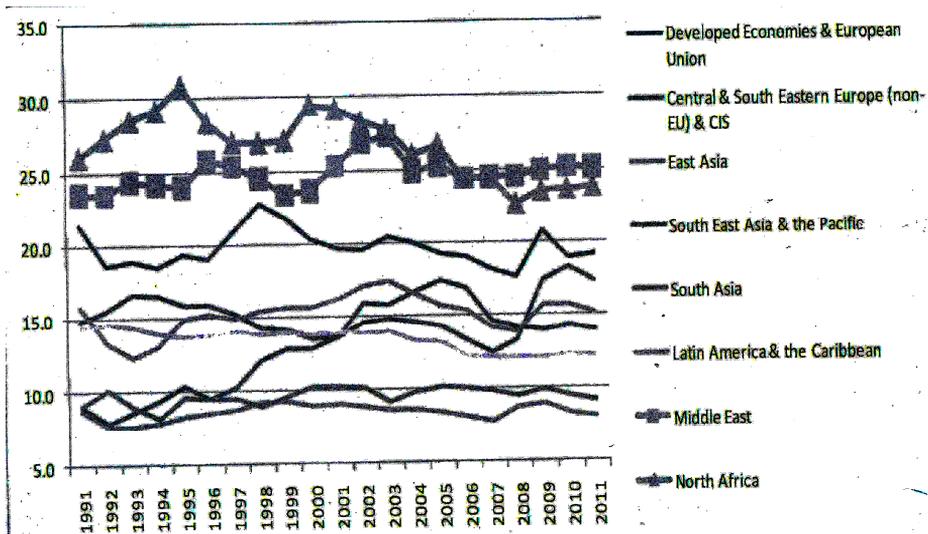
There has been many debates just how much the structural problems in the Arab states led to sudden political upheaval, but many confirm that all these states save few oil-rich countries, have massive problems dealing with population, youth bulge, youth, particularly educated youth, unemployment. In Arab countries population have grown 4 to 6 times since 1950 (Cordesman, 2011). Over a span of 1950 to 2010 population in Egypt grew from nearly 21 millions to more than 80 millions, in Tunisia from 3/6 to 10/5 millions, in Bahrain from 0/115 to 1/5 millions, in Saudi Arabia from 3/88 to 25/732 million in Libya from 0/961 to 6/461 and in Yemen from 4/777 to 23/407 (Cordesman, 1911). This happened and goes on to happen in a region that, beside economic growth problems, encounters with restrictions in terms of water and arable land.

What makes conditions more critical is the impact of the youth bulge. The youth bulge results to a massive pour of young men and women into economy that can not provide them with productive jobs and

decent income. Nearly one in five people in Middle East and North Africa are between 15- 24. The regions' youth labor force participation is the lowest in the world (ILO, 2011). These countries encounter, also, soaring youth unemployment higher for adults (around %20 for young men and over %30 young women). A large portion of these unemployed youth are educated young men and women. Bu-Azizi was one of them. Improved education level did not result in better labor market outcomes.

As chart 5 demonstrate youth unemployment in Middle East and North Africa was highest in the world in 1991-2011.

**Chart 5: Youth unemployment in Middle East and North Africa by Comparison with other regions**



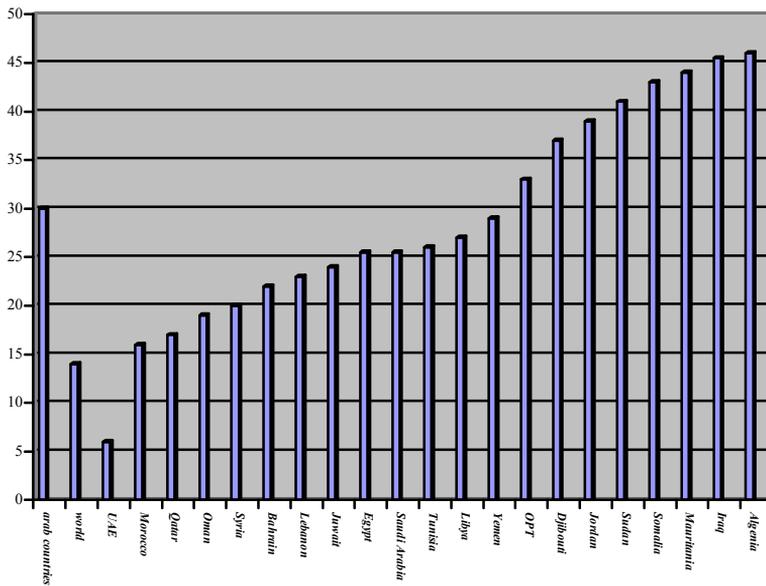
Source: ILO – Employment Policy Department

Yet there is other reality which GNP and per-capita income not say everything about it, and it is pattern of income distribution, meaning, notorious gap between the rich and the poor. For example Libya, an oil rich country with oil wealth, before recent revolution had a poverty rate

of some %30 of its population. United Nations development project in its Arab Human Development Report 2002 portrayed the Arab world as backward, ignorant and severely challenged, politically, socially and economically.

According to this report the Arab world had 65 million illiterate which about two-thirds of whom were women. It was economically stagnant, damaged by unemployment, corruption and falling living standard a dangerous combination if we add a high rate of concentration of young people, with %60 of population under 25 to it (Cordesman, 2011), (Chart 6).

**Chart 6: Unemployment Rate among Arab Youth**



Source: US Census Bureau: International Database,

[Http://www.census.gov/ipc/www.idb/informationGateway.php](http://www.census.gov/ipc/www.idb/informationGateway.php). accessed 21/4/2011

### **Periphery style of socio-economic changes**

During 1960s and 1970 most of the Arab states, like Egypt, Tunisia and Algeria pursued state- driven economic strategies which brought them a modest economic results, but not a less vulnerable social relation. After oil boom of 1971-1981 non oil rich countries faced with debts burden, and deficits. During late 1980 and early 1990 these troubles draw these countries toward International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank to seek help for their difficulty, and these international organizations as usual encouraged them to speed up their formerly embarked on market-oriented "reforms", and more truly deregulate their economy, promoting private sector growth and integrating their economies into the world market.

These neoliberal "reforms" brought some countries as Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria a moderate economic growth so as helped them to reduce public deficit and check inflation. Over past decade macroeconomic indicators improved in most of Arab counties. However despite macroeconomic performances and some growth in employment rate, as have been indicated, overall employment, particularly youth and women employment, due to high rate of population growth and youth bulge, turned to be an embracement. The pattern of growth was not sustainable and job-creating growth. Economic structures of these countries were highly dependent on external revenue sources, tourism, financial and energy export. Private investment was low and concentrated in capital intensive, which do not generate sufficient employment opportunities. Current global financial crisis further exacerbated labor market challenges, by slowing job creation and increasing lay-off and unemployment (Pacello, 2011, 4).

The state – sponsored employment programs have tended to generate only temporary jobs and not specifically directed towards young graduates who faced significant problems in entering the formal market. Structural adjustment reforms imposed by International Monetary Fund World Bank demolished welfare systems the governments had provided

throughout 1960s and 1970. The state welfare system degenerated progressively and went through serious crisis. Purchasing power of population faced the gradual erosion, while salaries stagnated. Soaring food prices did harm people more of all. All of these countries were highly dependent on the imported of basic food items. Global food price began to rise in 2006 (Pacello, 2011, 6).

### Poverty and unrest

One of evidences that attest to a kind of relation between uprisings and economic factors is correlation between some income indicators and unrests. The states that confront with "spring" unrest and entered the important phase of the revolution, except Saudi Arabia and Bahrain that enjoy huge oil income, all are among the lowest status in the world for their per capita ranking. Figure 1 shows just how low the CIA world fact book ranks the per capita income of North Africa and Middle East (NAME) countries. Obviously these countries are among the most deprived peripheries. The CIA fact book ranks these states below 100, an indicator which means serious overall poverty in today's global economy.

**Figure 2: Global ranking in per capita**

Country	World Ranking
Egypt	137
Tunisia	113
Yemen	172
Syria	152
Morocco	150
Jordan	143
Libya	52
Bahrain	54

Source: CIA World Fact book, 2011 for per capita income ranking, DOE/EIA, <http://www.eia.gov/countries/regious-topics.cfm?fips=OPEC> for per capita oil export revenues

### **Neo-liberalism and Authoritarianism**

While not all neo-liberal governments are necessarily authoritarian, authoritarianism in Arab states had some relations with advancing neo-liberal policies. Capital concentration in the new phase of monopoly capitalism, which some call it international monopoly capital, produces an imperialistic rent system. This kind of rent system creates an unequal exchange of the type in which difference between wages is beyond difference between their productivities. Preventive devices to bar labor migration from underdeveloped countries to developed countries results such difference in the level of wages. This gap between wages, in fact, makes a rent for world capitalist center. All of these leads to super exploitation of labor force in the periphery. Super exploitation is fundamental element of world imperialist system (Amin, 2010).

Combination of imperialism and super exploitation runs political systems of periphery towards various forms of autocratic rule. The shaky structures of the periphery states add to this kind of ruling. Monopoly capital in this stage of its development tirelessly pursues accumulation of monopoly rent, which means intensification of inequality, internally and externally.

Growing inequality and wide gap between upper class and lower classes is one of major sources of severe authoritarian political management. (Bellamy, 2006) the neo-liberal programs in Egypt and Tunisia served to consolidate the power of ruling class and concentrate the countries vast new wealth in hands of the riches who gained an increasing share of growing GNP in these countries. So concentration of wealth and concentration of political power went hand in hand. Ironically less than one year prior to uprising in Egypt the world Bank with so much praise named this country as one of the world's 10 most active reformer for fourth time.

### **Workers, the vanguard protester**

Neo-liberal transition required state coercion to repress labor resistance and squeeze the poor (Beinin, 2010). Neo-liberalism in Egypt and Tunisia, despite rhetoric about individual freedom and responsive government, went along with about 30 years of state of emergency. Prior new waves of revolutionary uprising, Egypt was scene of repeated labor strikes and protests. Egyptian Trade Union Federation first supported neo-liberal privatization, but when Prime Minister Ahmad Nazif in 2004 began to impose neo-liberal program with renewed vigor, and social relation deteriorated more rigorously, workers started to resist against it, and this resistance intensified more and more. Between 2004 and 2010 there were frequent and major strikes in clothing and textile, building, transport and food processing. When during the 2007 world food crisis, food prices increased as much as 24 percent massive bread riots extended in Egypt. Food price increases in 2008 begin with United States Federal Reserve decision to flooding the market with liquidity and inflating the price of assets value in dollars. The uprisings that extended across the Middle East were partly due to this inflation.

One of largest strike in Egypt took place in industrial town Mahalla in 2006. 2500 workers of spinning and weaving industry participated in this strike. On April 2008 a demonstration in Mahalla worried the Mubarak regime heavily, because protestors pulled down a picture of Mubarak for first time. In late 2009, a sit-in strike in Cairo Street brought a 325 percent increase in wages and to form the first independent labor union. Ben Ali, another champion of neoliberal reforms, like all Arab rulers sustained his power through repression, fear, and censorship. Despite some of his economic and social reforms, he hardly tolerated political transparency and prospect of power sharing (Shahi, 2012, 8).

### **Islamism as a reaction to marginalization**

Throughout Middle East and North Africa many people in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, Bahrain, Libya, Syria, Jordan are arising to bring about socio-political change. These events most likely will change social, political and even, security landscape of the Middle East and beyond.

What is happening in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya in recent elections demonstrates that the Islamist parties and groups have gained considerable votes of vast masses of citizens. Muslim people through these voting affirmed their care for their cultural values.

What in western media, academic discussion, theorizing and ideological propaganda traditionally refers to as "Islamism", "Islamist", and "Political Islam", and as a motive behind recent developments in the Islamic countries, is, at the same time a reaction to marginalizing approach to Moslem nations on part of Euro-centrists, and a reaction to this Euro-centrism on part of Muslims. Prevalent view in Western main stream thought is that what they call "political Islam" is medieval aberration. Western media abound with every kind of these comments. This orientalist understanding of so called political Islam also prevails in academic and "intellectual" circles. West oriented "intellectuals" in the Islamic countries too chatters same expressions.

This orientalist understanding of Islam entails Eurocentric world view. Orientalist and culturalist perception of Islam is, in fact, an "enlightened" justification of global capitalist dominance of "backward" nations (Amin - Khan, 2009). Surely this perception of Islam is very simplistic. "The political Islam", as western media calls it, is not against modernism. It is against colonialism and imperialism. The political Islam seeks modernization in its own way. Many modern ideal and institutions such as progress, modern state bureaucracy, nation-state structure, and representative government has been accepted by Islamic activists.

The political Islam has become an important social and political force in many Islamic countries since anti colonial and revival movements among majority Moslems people of these countries. These forces have been target of attack by the United States, other western imperial states. Ironically they are also subject of opposition and attack by many anti-imperialist and nationalist intellectuals and of leftists, both in Islamic nations and in the world. One of these is Samir Amin, famous Marxist ideologue, an Egyptian author. Samir Amin in his recent essay about Arab Springtime has a low assess of results of this movement due

to this fact that Islamists as Ikhvanal Moslemeen is the most Influential component of Egyptian revolution (Amin, 2011).

Samir Amin in an article issued in 2007 had attacked political Islam as a movement that refrain from "real presence in the areas where actual social conflict takes place. Thus, as he claims, on the terrain of real social issues, political Islam aligns itself with the camp of dependent capitalism and dominated imperialism (Amin, 2007). Referring to Ikhavan al Moslemeen in Egypt he refers to this Jama'at's support for the rights of property owners to detriment of right of tenant farmers as only "one example among hundreds of others" (Ibid).

Samir Amin assessment is opposed by some other Marxists, including his fellow columnist Tariq Amin-Khan. Tariq Amin Khan view political and militant Islam as a powerful social and political reality that is influencing and altering cultural, political and social reality in Moslem communities. He sees this Zeal for alteration not as a reactionary uproar, but a quest for modernization and to gain national dignity and self autonomy. No doubt, political Islam has not registered monotonous records. In international area Muslim militant, some days collaborated with US imperialism, like what happened in Afghanistan during soviet intervention in that country. However, how can we forget that after withdrawal of Soviet Union troops from Afghanistan demonization of Islam and clash of civilizations thesis began to emerge from the United States' politicians and theoreticians (Amin-Khan, 2009).

But if we start from much debated modernization and modernity story, which is one of main point of reference to negate political Islam there is much to say about simplistic claims in this respect. Tariq Amin-Khan views this culturalistic point of reference from a different point. He holds that "Western political leaders and the media and liberal capitalist state's organic intellectual have been steeped in culturalism since the heyday of post 1945 ear and launching of modernization theory-creating binaries between "traditional" and "modern" cultures and "freedom" and "totalitarianism" – to contrast the "free enterprise" Western Capitalist

culture broadly as a superior cultural paradigm than other preceding or prevailing non Euro/American cultures" (Amin-Khan, 2009).

Interesting enough, now political Islamists, in their turn, use the culturalist terrain to mobilize their base of support against what they claim is US "evil design" on Moslems and "Moslem values". That this kind of culturalism can't grasp economic aspect of capitalist globalism is another matter that doesn't negate its anti-colonial and anti-imperial progressive sides. Political Islamists claim to bring about a "just Islamic welfare society", a position once claimed by political left. But the left has been so hounded and beaten in the past 50 years of repression that revitalization of it need a huge struggle and a long time. In such circumstances political Islamists makes an effective substitute in struggle against marginalization.

It is worth noting that though Arab Spring movement has important Islamic position in its combination, but is not same as avowed objective of establishing Islamic law (Sharia). This movement consists of a mixture of groups and demands. It proceeds by spontaneous mass protests. These sweeping changes are taking away many Al Qaeda supporters and their potential support base, and will teach Al Qaeda that mass protect is more efficient than terrorist action which they embarked on in their campaign (Gunaratna, 2011).

### **Sum up**

The Arab awakening movement is new wave of mass protects against social, economical, and political marginalization that imposed on Arab people by world capitalist centers and its client states. Neoliberal policies in some forerunner Arab countries had straight impact upon aggravating socio-economic problems that provoked uprising. New wave of protests, which has some immediate socio-economic roots is, at the same time, a reflection of deep grievances entails general position of periphery countries. Now people rise against political, economical, social and cultural deprivations to defend their identity, dignity, liberty, and welfare.

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