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Democracy Against Social Reform: the Arab "Spring" Faces its Demons[1]

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> "[Revolutions] are the consequences but never the causes of the downfall of political authority."
>
> Hannah Arendt, 1963

> "And inasmuch as the revolution dominated the first year, counter-revolution, in all its forms, has made a comeback in the second phase. Today we are witnessing the rise of new forms of counter counter-revolution. Some are peaceful, others violent and if left unchecked, will further destabilize the region."
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> Marwan Bishara, 2013

As the scenario of the Arab uprisings still unfolds, I will offer some reflections on the manner in which efforts to engineer *political change* tend to stand in the way of *social reform*. Before I venture into this analysis, I would like to introduce a proviso: not being a specialist on the region, I do not have the hubris of offering a standard analysis (conceptualization thoroughly substantiated with evidence) of the upheavals in the Arab world and the socio-political transformations they triggered. For the sake of academic honesty, yet deliberately defying the conventions of academic writing, I will disclose that part of my biography that serves as an experiential entry point into my analysis of the events in the Middle East and North Africa. This entry point is my personal participation in the anti-communist revolutions of 1989 in Eastern Europe – an experience that colors strongly my perspective on the Arab uprisings.

I grew up in Bulgaria, under the 'old regime' of state socialism, genuinely committed to the values of communism, until I became disenchanted and frustrated, like many of my peers, with the privileges the ruling elites bestowed themselves to the detriment of the population, and in rampant violation of the very doctrine that legitimated

their rule. In my first year at the university, I joined a dissident group and became involved in the protests against the communist regime; I also participated in the organization of the student strikes that eventually triggered the downfall of the regime. Our outrage was against the *abuse of power*; our demands were for *responsible rule*. We were, indeed, successful in triggering the downfall of the communist regime. Yet, my involvement in the dissident movements and student revolts left me with a sense of failure despite our apparent success, as the blueprint of capitalist liberal democracy, imported from the West, swiftly replaced the communist dictatorship. The sources of this feeling of failure, which arose already while the dictatorship was crumbling, were two: First, the dissidents, especially the young people who had sparked the revolt, were quickly pushed aside -- our revolution was hijacked by the old generation, just as it is happening now in Egypt. The second source of the disappointment was the discrepancy between our protests and the political order they engendered. Our grievances and our desires for change had very little to do with the models of Western capitalist democracies that powerful elites erected via formally democratic processes.[2] It is this cunning betrayal of social change by the political process of transition that I suspect is now happening to the Arab societies in turmoil.

I am now looking at the upheaval across the Arab world with the same hopes, but also with the same fears, which we, the makers of the anti-communist revolutions in Eastern Europe had twenty years ago.[3] My ambition in this chapter is therefore limited to the desire to reflect on some features of the Arab uprisings that resemble the trajectory of the revolutions in Eastern Europe, in order to highlight the fragile opportunities for positive change – opportunities which I hope the peoples of the Middle East and North Africa would not waste, the way we let them slip in Eastern Europe a quarter of a century ago.

In what follows, I will first address the conundrums that even seemingly successful revolutions encounter – the danger of erecting a desired political edifice (in the case in hand – democracy) without undertaking social reform. Drawing on my concept of 'critical political judgment' – judgment that proceeds from the particulars of social grievances rather than from the precepts of available principles and rules,[4] I will then venture to discern the immanent goals of the Arab uprisings – that is, goals that emerge as a result of the critique of the old regime contained in the initial acts of rebellion, rather than as later rationalizations of the efforts for change. Finally, I will address the likelihood that the political system that is being put into place as a purported embodiment of the objective of change can effectively achieve these goals.

The Dangers of Successful Democratization

The Arab uprisings are now living in the critical interzone between Past and Future. This interzone is suspended between two types of freedom: freedom *from* and freedom *to*, as the German thinker Hannah Arendt named them – the negative, cleansing moment of the destruction of the old order and the positive, constructive moment of the creation of the new one. The swift transition from the negative to the positive moment is crucial for the success of social uprisings, as failure to do so means falling into chaos (Libya), civil war (Syria), or resurrection of the old regimes under a new guise.

However, there is a danger also contained within the happy scenario of the swift transition from protest to a desired new order: I will claim that even when societies successfully make the transition to democracy, as we see now happening in Egypt and Tunisia (holding elections, setting up constitutional assemblies), the dynamics of *political success* can be triggering dynamics of *social failure*. This is so because much depends on the degree to which the link between past and future (the moments of demolition and construction) is constituted as being an adequate translation of the initial social grievances (those that had triggered the rejection of the old regime) into a new political order. Only

so far as the new political order emerges through policy solutions to the social suffering that had triggered the rejection of the old regime can the new regime claim to have fulfilled its historical mission.

Why is this important? Because the manner in which the bridge from past to future is constructed determines whether the new order will acquire not only legality and formal acceptance, but also legitimacy and effective public endorsement. I have in mind here legitimation in sociological, rather than philosophical sense. Legitimation in the sociological sense is "a matter of justifications of rule empirically available, ones that the citizens… are likely to find valid, under the given historical circumstances".[5] The new political order can acquire legality on two grounds: (1) because it is in substance a rejection of the old order – for instance, the replacement of a monarchy with a republic or of a dictatorship with a democracy; (2) when the transition is undertaken according to valid procedures (for instance, via elections, or constitutional conventions and referenda) – as we have seen happening in Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco.

However, acquiring legality does not grant automatically legitimacy in the sociological sense I specified – that is, citizens might not embrace the new regime as the desired outcome of transition. As sociological legitimacy has a strongly behavior-orienting effect for actors, it is a necessary condition for affecting social change beyond a political change.[6]

Sociological legitimacy can be achieved only when the new order is an adequate *response to the grievance* that had triggered the original protest, rather than a rationalization of the change emerging within the subsequent ideological battles among actors struggling for power. Such battles are likely to substitute the original grievances with the interests of the constituencies they purport to represent, as well as to focus attention on the crafting of new political rules of engagement allowing the maximization of their political presence. This is exactly the risk the rebelled societies of the Arab World

are now facing – that, in their rush to constitute the new political order, they fail to carry out social reforms even as they carry out successfully political reforms. This ultimately will deprive the new regimes of sociological legitimacy, as the social pathologies that had undermined the old regimes, if unaddressed, would be reproduced under the new ones. This is the error that the anti-communist revolutions in much of Eastern Europe committed twenty years ago. As we rushed to create the future, the issues that had triggered our outrage against the old regimes (abuse of power, corruption, privileges, socially irresponsible rule entailing poverty) were sidetracked by grand platforms of justice advancing democracy or capitalism as being the goals of the revolution. That is why the capitalist liberal democracies we built in Eastern Europe are deficient of legitimacy – and they experience now a wave of popular reactions against them, even a rejection of democracy and nostalgia for the old regime among young people who have never lived under state socialism.

The Ambitions of the Arab Revolts

What are, then, the 'immanent goals' of the social upheavals across the Arab world? Some voices are urging, "Islam is the solution"[7], others -- that a secular regime, human rights, free markets, are the solution. The crucial question, however, is: *The solution to what?*

To recognize the aim of our actions, Hannah Arendt observed, is not a matter of free will (say, as we chose between candidates in democratic elections). It is a matter of right or wrong judgment.[8] In order not to squander the opportunities that social upheavals enable, we need to apply what I have called a *critical political judgment*.[9] This judgment has three features.

First: critical judgment does not equal a political decision (exercise of will) – it is a judgment about the grounds on which power can be exercised. Therefore, we must ask – on what grounds is power given to the parties that are now being propelled to power?

Second: Identifying the proper grounds for the exercise of power requires keeping focus on the grievance that has triggered the social protest. In the turmoil of a revolution, as I recall, it is not clear what people's aspirations are, and these aspirations are often conflicting. However, all revolutions are triggered by a broadly shared social frustration (ours was expressed in the terms 'this life is not normal'). The aims of a revolution are already latent in the protest that sparked the revolt and analyses should start there, taking these revolts as empirical entry points of analysis. It is important to stay focused on this frustration, to decode it and relate it to the construction of the new order, rather than rush into building the future with available blueprints – such as democracy, human rights, or the scriptures of Sharia law.

The third feature of critical political judgment is that it keeps its focus on systemic forms of injustice. Let me explain: Grievances of injustice come in two types. The first type concerns the unequal distribution of power among actors – for instance between men and women, among ethnic and religious groups, between religious and secular groups, or between an oppressive regime and its population. This I call the 'relational' dimension of injustice. However, there is another dimension of injustice, which has nothing to do with the oppression of one group by another, but rather with the social conditions in which people live – the *rules of the game* to which all participants are subjected. I call this 'systemic' dimension of injustice. It concerns the living conditions as generated by the political economy of a given society.[10]

It is usually systemic injustice, related to unacceptable social conditions (and I do not mean simply poverty, as poverty is a matter of relational injustice), that triggers revolutions – the bourgeois revolutions of the eighteenth century targeted the replacement not simply the political order of parliamentary monarchism that excluded the bourgeoisie from power, but the replacement of the feudalistic political economy with a capitalist one. However, the relational aspects of the distribution of power are closer to the surface and

are more easily activated (for instance, the distribution of power between religious and secular actors or among social groups). The danger is that issues of systemic injustice are sidetracked as revolutions focus on relational aspect of how power is divided among the main actors. A symptom that this is happening in the context of the Arab uprisings is that public debate is now strongly marked by sectarianism – the battle of groups for a stake in the distribution of power (the battle among strands of Islam, or between Islamist and secular groups, between new actors and incumbent elites such as the military). The danger here is that, as we rush to change the political realm we might fail to change the fabric of society, as Hanna Arendt (1990) has aptly put it.[11]

Let us now try to identify the grievance that triggered the explosion of popular protest across an Arab World. To recall, understanding correctly this change-initiating grievance is important for two reasons: (1) to articulate the proper grounds on which the new public authorities can exercise power; and (2) to give proper sociological legitimacy to the new political order, by constructing it as a response to that grievance.

Looking at the various examples we have at hand – Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, Jordan, Syria, I would include also Morocco, what is the common denominator among them? Most strikingly, these were insurgencies against ferociously secular regimes.[12] Is this why Islamist parties are rising to power? This might explain why Islamic parties are winning votes, but does not explain for what purposes (in the name of what political goals) power is given to them.

Let us look more carefully at the spectrum of injustices in these societies. These societies were haunted, in various degrees, by both types of injustices: relational – having to do with the oppression of religious groups by secular dictatorships, and by the oppression of religious and ethnic groups by a group favored by the ruling elite), as well as structural injustice – having to do with the way the political economy determined the living conditions in these countries.

The primordial trigger of the uprisings, however, was a protest against degrading living conditions that were experienced as assault on human dignity. Let us recall that the explosion of protests in 2011 was triggered by the suicide of a 26-year-old Tunisian street vendor, a university graduate exasperated by his inability to provide for his basic livelihood. The revolts were preceded by the worker protests that erupted in 2008 in Gafsa -- the mining centre of phosphate extraction, where an experienced worker earned the equivalent of 90 euro.[13] The economic and social malaise that sparked the protests was not caused by lack of modernisation ('economic backwardness'), nor did it have to do with the secular nature of the regimes. Since the 1980s, governments in the region had adopted liberal economic policies as prescribed by the IMF and the World Bank.[14] However, the introduction of the free market has been particularly painful in autocratic societies in which power and resources are already centralized and consolidated, as the Lebanese political philosopher Ghassan Salamé has argued. As he points out, the passage to a market economy in some Arab societies created even greater economic *instability* for the masses (and I stress instability, rather than poverty), however much it may have contributed to the overall wealth of these societies. Protests sprung from the realization that the passage to free market capitalism had benefitted few and generally harmed most citizens, as hoards of young graduates remained unemployed as a result of neoliberal economic policy. Let us also recall that the precedent to the 2011 uprising in Egypt were the worker protests in 2006 – against Mubarak's export-oriented neoliberal policies prescribed by the IMF and the World Bank.

Note, however, that even in the country which so far has been most successful in its transition to democracy – Tunisia, the ideological battles between Islamists and secularists have dominated the political arena, side-lining the social and economic issues that initiated the desire for change. No wonder that the street protests in Tunisia have continued, and grievances widened to include housing, job security, and state benefits.

To the extend that the protests were not a rebellion against the fierce secularism of the ousted regimes, we cannot assert that power is being given to the Islamic parties on religious grounds, for the purposes of establishing Islamic rule. What are the grounds, then, of the power granted to Islamic parties in the course of democratic elections?

The language in which the grievances have been expressed is highly symptomatic of the nature of the uprisings' imminent goals.[15] The slogan of the Tunisian popular protests read "Work – Freedom –National dignity, as well as "Get out" (in French, Dégage, addressing Ben Ali). The grievances were overwhelmingly expressed in the terms of violations of dignity, of *karamah*. However, it would be wrong to interpret directly violations of dignity as a matter of political oppression and therefore – as calls for political freedoms. In Arab culture, *karamah* is essentially a social concept.[16] The word karamah is derived from *karam* (generosity). In this sense, dignity is related to the capacity to give rather than receive, to provide and care, rather than be endowed with rights and privileges.[17] Violations of dignity were caused particularly by the humiliation of crushing poverty and degradation. In contrast, calls for *Al Hurriyah* (non-oppression) were secondary, and related to the realization that the assault on dignity via degrading social conditions was committed by the oppressive regimes.[18] In this sense, the protests targeted both the systemic injustice of humiliating social conditions and 'rules of the game' on one hand, and the relational injustices of poverty and subordination to oppressive rulers, on the other.

Here the grievances against the two forms of injustice converge to highlight the fundamental concern activating the uprisings – that of the *political responsibility* ruling elites held for the conditions of the societies they governed. Importantly, in the societies of the Middle East and North Africa where uprisings occurred, people were not simply frustrated by the conditions in which they lived, but felt that the ruling political elites were to blame. The issue of political responsibility became associated to that of humiliating

social conditions. As demographers (such as Emmanuel Todd et Youssef Courbage 2007) point out, attitudes of political activism targeting the responsibility of the state arise in societies with high literacy.[19] Let us recall that among the first images of the mass protest in Tunisia was that of young people showing their diplomas and protesting that they cannot find a job despite being highly qualified. It is significant that, by contrast, the connection between poverty and political responsibility is not being made in Algeria and Morocco where the education levels are considerably lower than those in Tunisia and Egypt. In both Algeria and Morocco, grievances against poverty have not been linked to the criminal responsibility of existing regimes; thus, instead of calling the monarchy to account, Moroccans are relying on King Mohammad's good will (who initiated constitutional reforms, approved by referendum).

Therefore, we have good grounds to claim that the original grievance triggering the Arab uprisings was not simply a grievance against poverty, but against irresponsible rule causing social injustice. The proper goal of the revolutions, therefore, is the establishment of responsible rule able to deliver social justice. Is Islam the answer to this? That may very well be. I will come back to this point.

Before that I would like to clarify my claim that socially responsible governance (the immanent goal of the Arab uprisings) does not automatically equate with political and economic freedom, nor does it equate with democracy.

To explain the difference, I will draw on the work of Emmanuel Kant. In his short political essay *The Perpetual Peace*, Kant draws a distinction between the organization of power (*forma imperii) and* the way in which the state makes use of its power (*forma regiminis*). The organization of power can take three forms -- autocracy, aristocracy, or democracy while the style of rule is either despotic or republican.[20] Kant warned against confusing the republican constitution with the democratic one, remarking that democracy is perfectly compatible with the despotic exercise of power.[21] Kant's insight into the

superior importance of the style of exercise of power over the way power is organized[22], directs attention to two ways in which power in a democracy (as a form of organization of power) can be exercised -- *in a socially responsible* way in contrast to simply *responsive* way.[23] Democracy, as popular sovereignty, self-rule, is a form of responsive governance. But, as we have seen in the experience of western democracies, responsive governance does no always guarantee a socially responsible rule.

The concept of responsible rule predates considerably that of democracy and the rule of law in the political history of Western Europe. One can find it in the Bible, where in the chapter Genesis of the Old Testament, we read that God gave dominion of man over all living creatures. This dominion is described not in the terms of rule over subjects, but as husbandry, as responsibility for overseeing the wellbeing of those who are in your care. Historically, a relationship of mutual dependence between public authority and subjects was established in the absolute monarchies of sixteen-century Europe – thus, the practice of responsible governance preceded that of responsive governance (that came with democracies much later – in the nineteenth century).[24]

The later devices of rule of law and democracy consolidated responsible government as they also forced it to take the shape of accountable and responsive government. Yet, the liberal mechanisms of accountability that constrain power (such as the checks and balances among the branches of government), and the democratic mechanisms of making power responsive to people's preferences (via elections) are not the foundations of responsible power, they are its stabilizing devices. Democratic, responsive, power is neither always responsible, nor always competent, as Alexis de Tocqueville already observed at the dawn of democratic government in Europe and America.

Islam, secularism, and socially-responsible governance

My main point so far has been that the new governments emerging from the Arab uprisings would have sociological legitimacy (and thereby proper public endorsement and historical durability) only on condition that they deliver socially responsible governance that addresses the demands for social reforms (thematised as decent living conditions) – concerns that sparked the social upheavals.

Can the Islamic parties that are being propelled to power in the region through democratic elections deliver this? Undoubtedly. Will they deliver it? We have reasons to doubt that. Let me address these doubts next. Islamic parties are in principle well able to provide responsible governance aiming at the wellbeing of the population. Such a notion of responsible governance is part of the heritage of Islamic culture. Islamic literature is rich in injunctions about integrity in politics and the rejection of usurious speculation in economics; about ethical behavior, condemning cheating and corruption, as well as respecting the environment.[25] (Tariq Ramadan and Mustafa Akyol, among other scholars, have written eloquently on this). The Quran spells out rights intended to protect the ruled from the rulers. Moreover, the original meaning of 'umma' -- which is commonly translated as 'Muslim commonwealth' – is 'community' and in the Medina of the time of the prophet the umma comprised Muslims and non-Muslims.[26] Most importantly, the Muslim Brotherhood has demonstrated that it has strong governance know-how. It effectively delivered social services at the grass roots level in Egypt under the old regime, doing what the government failed to do – taking care of its population. Members of the Muslim Brotherhood were active in the professional syndicates and trade unions, thus gaining a reputation for competent and responsible governance.[27]

However, despite its *ability* to claim legitimacy based on responsible governance in the interests of all, the particular Islamic parties that are aspiring to power are generally failing to do this. The trajectories of failure are multiple. First, they are invoking historical and religious legitimacy (that is, either that they have been in opposition to the old regime,

or they stress Islam as a religion), rather than invoking the notion of responsible rule, as available in the Quran, and formulating corresponding social and economic policies. Most commonly, electoral rhetoric has been following the line "the previous governments committed all kinds of abuses because they did not fear God; the Islamists fear God, therefore they will be good rulers".

Second, Islamic parties are focusing on the relational, rather than the structural aspects of the new order – they are more focused on securing the strong representation of the population as Muslims (that is why they appeal to Sharia law), rather than creating a political economy that would alleviate social and economic injustice for all. This is the curse of sectarianism as insurrections triggered by indignation with socially irresponsible rule now give way to the struggle for power and the question 'who governs' replaces the question "how do we want to live".

The third way in which Islamic parties are hindering the initial impulse to social change is by maintaining the economic policies of the old regime. It is not just corruption and favoritism under the old regimes that brought about humiliating social conditions, but neoliberal economic policy (which under Mubarak's regime brought nearly a third of all Egyptians below the poverty line.[28]) Reportedly, Khairat-el-Shater, the multimillionaire businessman, deputy-chairman of the Muslim Brotherhood, promotes a version of Islam that explicitly promotes neoliberal capitalism along the lines of private, export-oriented growth that Mubarak promoted. The leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood has clumped down on dissent regarding economic policy.[29] Hassan Malek, speaking for the Muslim Brotherhood in the run-up to the parliamentary elections in 2011, declared that Mubarak's free-market policies were on the right track.[30]

While Islamic parties are failing to deliver socially responsible rule despite being in principle equipped to do so, secular regimes are no less prone to the same failure, to the extent that they do not enact the socio-economic and political changes implied in the

demands of the popular uprisings. Engaging in socially responsible governance is now being hindered above all by the hardening of the main political divide along Islamism-secularism lines, thus diverting attention away from socio-economic reforms, and focusing it instead on the issue of who holds power and the manner in which power is exercised. Thus, when the military-backed interim government in Egypt outlawed the Muslim Brotherhood – the party with largest popular support in the county that led in elections over the past three years – it considerably weakened its own sociological legitimacy, even as its formal legal legitimacy might be unscarred.[31] Equally regrettably, the expulsion from politics of one of the country's oldest and largest political organizations on grounds that it speaks for radical Islam, in fact completed the ossification of the orienting lines of a meaningful political divide in the country in the terms Islamism-versus-secularism.

To recap, the political dynamics of transition from autocratic rule in the Arab world are beginning to betray the initial ambitions of the social upheaval in three ways: by continuing the economic policy that had made livelihoods increasingly precarious under the old regimes; by giving political relevance to Islam (allowing the impact of Sharia Law on the political framework of rule); and /or by mobilizing political support on sectarian grounds.

The imposition of Sharia law would be wrong for several reasons: Firstly, it is the law accepted as valid by only a *section* of the population, be that the majority. Secondly, Sharia law, as a collection of rules for Muslims to obey, has a strongly prescriptive nature, thus excluding the notion of critical political judgment I referred to earlier as the tool of finding the right political solutions to social grievances. Third, development of the Sharia law has taken place in a direction away from the original inclusive rationalism of the Quran – the word of God as revealed to Mohammed. This has happened, as the Islamic scholar Mustafa Akyol reminds us, by way of codifying into law the *hadith* – sayings attributed to the prophet later, and whose source are the power politics and social mores of

a conservative, desert society, incorporating practices imported into Arab culture (such as the stoning of women, imported from Judaism, and the veiling and seclusion of women, imported from Persia and Christian Byzantium).[32]

To avoid a likely misunderstanding – my argument is not against the rule of Islamic parties; rather, my hope is that Islamic parties would adopt the inclusive ethos of responsible governance that is part of the Islamic political tradition (the collective wisdom encoded in the Quran) without resort to the precepts of Sharia Law.

However, we already see that policy change is deviating from the original concern with the provision of social justice by responsible governments, as the question of who holds power trumps the question to what end is power to be exercised, what type of societies are to be created. This displaces the energy of the social upheavals in the wrong direction; it also would deprive the new governments from social legitimacy, despite their perfect legality.

Paradoxically, it is democracy (parliamentary elections based on universal suffrage) that is the main engine now undermining social reform. First, elections are opening the door to the dominance of powerful economic actors, who have a vested interest in preserving the economic models of the old regimes.[33]

Second, it is exactly the universal franchise that diverts politics away from the call for responsible, rather than responsive, rule and which marginalizes the young people who issued this call. Islamic parties are responding to the social grievance of poverty, as they focus their electoral discourse on the cost of food and promise better living conditions. The typical comments one can hear at polling stations in poorer districts is that while people want stability and strong economy, "it is ultimately in God's hands".[34] The discourse that the future of the country is in God's hands is in frequent use by Islamic parties at the times of electoral mobilization – a discourse that goes directly against the notion of responsible and accountable governance that ignited the uprisings.

There is a third way in which election-led change is side-tracking social reform – this concerns the fact that, as parties are competing against each other, they mobilize particular constituencies; they have to draw lines, which brings sectarianism to the fore – thus, dynamics start to focus on the relational dimension of change (how power is distributed), rather than on the structural one – what society is to emerge from the revolutions.

A more reliable mechanism of transition, I believe, are round-table talks at which the main actors (in the case of the Arab upheavals – the youth movements, the professionals, the Islamic groups, the military where it supported the uprisings, etc.) can discuss what needs to be changed and how. As the American political sociologist Andrew Arato has observed, the normative advantage of the round table talks lies in their production of legitimacy. I believe this legitimacy is achieved only when the round table talks manage to maintain a robust link between the initial grievance that sparked the mass protests, and the new political order.[35]

Conclusion: The Arab upheavals approaching their future

The substitution of social change with political change, and of responsible governance with simply responsive rule, are the immediate dangers for the Arab uprisings. However, as they still inhabit the critical interzone between past and future, these societies still have the enviable chance to set aside available models, either borrowed from the West, or found in local religious doctrines, and craft a model of their own, in terms as yet unfamiliar. Suffices that they focus their energies on solving the social pathologies that sparked the uprisings, and ground the newly established public authority on the ethos of responsible governance that the young protesters are still demanding.

And it is in this sense that the Arab uprisings carry an important message to the inhabitants of the old western democracies. If we have the courage to admit that the social grievances that triggered the Arab uprisings are also the injustices ruining our Western

societies, we will have to wake up to one unsettling question: "Where is the revolt of the

West"?

[1] This chapter originated as a guest lecture at the Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilizations, Aga Khan University, London, 19 April, 2012.

[2] Already in the course of my involvement in the anti-communist revolutions I started arguing that our efforts were in fact engendering an autocratic in nature regime, quite similar to the regime that we were trying to oust, which made me a dissident under the 'new regime' (such analyses of mine, 'being too left of the center' in the words of one publisher, could not appear in Bulgaria, but were subsequently published in the U.S.). See Albena Azmanova, "Dictatorships of Freedom", *Praxis International* 12/2 (1992): 145-157.

[3] I deliberately refrain from applying the term 'revolutions' to the popular uprisings in north Africa and the Middle East in the way I refer to the events in East and Central Europe of 25 years ago as 'revolutions'. The latter brought about a radical socio-political transformation from communist dictatorships to capitalist liberal democracies; the jury is still out on the direction of the socio-economic transformation instigated by the Arab uprisings.

[4] This notion draws on Kant's distinction between, on one hand, *determinate* judgment – the faculty to apply pre-given norms to a concrete situation, and on the other – r*eflective* judgment, which proceeds from the complexity of the particular situation. I reconceptualize the notion of reflective judgment within critical social theory's (of Frankfurt school origin) understanding of immanent critique, which takes social grievances as empirical entry points of analysis. See Albena Azmanova, *The Scandal of Reason: A Critical Theory of Political Judgment* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

[5] This should not be confused with legitimacy as a normative matter, from the point of view of moral philosophical reflection. (Andrew Arato, lecture 4, College de France, 29 March 2012); this particular distinction is introduced in his earlier works, e.g. Andrew Arato and Jean Cohen, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (MIT Press, 1992), 69 and 74.

[6] It is in this sense that Max Weber speaks of 'ethos' as a set of worldviews having important formative influences on conduct. See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. T. Parsons (London and New York: Routledge, 1992[1930]), 27.

[7] The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt raised this slogan during the first few months of the protests in 2011, but they distanced themselves from it during and after the electoral campaigns of 2012. They no longer raise it in their public discourse as does Nahda in Tunisia.

[8] H. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, Eight Exercises in Political Thought. New York: Penguin Books, 1993[1961]), 152.

[9] Azmanova, *The Scandal of Reason.*

[10] In the work of Marx, for instance, relational domination concerns the *exploitation* of the working class by the owners of productive capital, which places the working class in a subordinated position, while systemic domination concerns the all-inclusive dynamics of *alienation* as all are subjected to the imperatives of value production under capitalism. When women in Western societies, after decades of political mobilization, gained access to the labor market on an equal par with men, they corrected the relational injustice of being excluded from the labor market and being thereby deprived of social recognition

related to holding a job and being financially subordinated to men. However, this only subjected women more directly to the systemic injustice of finding social valorization and emancipation by being subjected to the productivist demands of a capitalist political economy. See Albena Azmanova, "De-gendering social justice in the 21st century: An immanent critique of neoliberal capitalism", *European Journal of Social Theory* 2 (2012): 143-156.

[11] Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (London and New York: Penguin, 1990[1963]), 24.

[12] The regimes were anti-Islamist, but not anti-Muslim, as I've been reminded by Zakia Hamda (personal correspondence).

[13] Ibid.

[14] For the case of Egypt, see Jason Hickel, "Neoliberal Egypt: The hijacked revolution": http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/03/201232784226830522.html

[15] I am here relying on the work done by my research assistant Nadine Hassouneh.

[16] Jane Gabriel, "Karama: women activists across the Middle East", *OpenDemocracy*, 28 November 2007; accessed 15 April 2012 at http://www.opendemocracy.net/blog/5050/karama

[17] Contrast this approach to dignity with the emergence of claims to universal rights in European history: the first articulation of claims to rights, justified on grounds of human dignity, is perhaps the English barons' forcing King John to grant them protections against absolutist rule in the form of privileges codified as rights in the Magna Charta of 1215.

[18] *Al Hurriyah* in Arabic is literally translated as both freedom and liberty (the antonym of slavery). Al Hurr (noun) is a person who is considered flawless (in most cases, morally flawless). Hurriyat-ul-Arab, derived from Al Huriyyah of Arabs means: the honour of Arabs.

[19] Youssef Courbage and Emmanuel Todd, *Le rendez-vous des civilisations* (Paris: Seuil, 2007).

[20] Emanuel Kant, "Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch" in Kant, *Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992[1795]): 93- 130. Kant here notes that in a despotism the public will is administered by the ruler as his own will. The division between executive and legislative power marks republican rule.

[21] According to Kant, of the three forms of the state, that of democracy is, properly speaking, necessarily a despotism, because it establishes an executive power in which "all" decide for or even against one who does not agree; that is, "all," who are not quite all, decide, and this is a contradiction of the general will with itself and with freedom. (Ibid.).

[22] "The mode of governments, however, is incomparably more important to the people than the form of sovereignty, although much depends on the greater or lesser suitability of the latter to the end of [good] government" (Ibid.).

[23] For a more extensive exposition of this idea see Albena Azmanova, "The Crisis of Europe: Democratic Deficit and Eroding Sovereignty – Not Guilty," *Law and Critique* 24/1 (2013): 23-38.

[24] The ethos of responsible governance was discussed both by Hobbes and Machiavelli, as well as Shakespeare, and their examples were those of constitutional monarchy, not of democracy. They stressed the responsibility of leaders to rule for the good of their populations.

[25] Tariq Ramadan, "Islam's role in an ethical society", *The Guardian* online, 23 February, 2010.

[26] Mustafa Akyol, *Islam without Extremes: A Muslim Case for Liberty* (Norton, 2012)

[27] Yasmine El Rashidi, "Egypt on the Edge", *The New York Review of Books*, January 1, 2012.

[28] "Mubarak with the help of the US, implemented a battery of macroeconomic reforms that shifted wealth and power to the upper socioeconomic strata of the population. The privatization of public services enriched well-connected cronies while putting education and healthcare out of reach for many, the elimination of subsidies and tariffs undermined local businesses and drove up unemployment rates, labour standards were systematically eviscerated, unions were violently repressed and the tax burden was shifted from the rich to the poor." Jason Hickel, "Neoliberal Egypt: The hijacked revolution", accessed on 13 April 2012 at

http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/03/201232784226830522.html

[29] Ibid.

[30] "He stated that the economic policies in force during Hosni Mubarak's rule were on the right track, but were overshadowed by blatant corruption and a culture of favoritism", quoted in Marwa Awad , "Egypt Brotherhood businessman: manufacturing is key", Reuters, Oct 28, 2011; accessed 13 April 2012 at http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/10/28/us-egypt-brotherhood-investment-idUSTRE79R1NQ20111028

[31] In June 2012, Mohamed Morsi became the first democratically elected head of state in Egyptian history, but was removed by the military in July 2013 after mass protests triggered by poor governance and Morsi's moves to monopolize power and secure the political presence of Islam (he granted himself unlimited powers as well as the power to legislate without judicial oversight or review of his acts, and called for a referendum on the Islamist-backed draft constitution he issued, which was perceived by his opponents as an "Islamist coup"). An interim government headed by the chief justice was set up, backed by Egypt's security forces, judiciary, and economic elite. The interim government designated the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization (as the leadership of the Brotherhood, towards the end of Morsi's rule, had visibly veered closer to former jihadis), while calling a referendum on 14-15 January 2014 on a constitution drafted without the group's input. The country became again awash with anti-government demonstrations in the winder of 2013-2014, headed by Muslim Brotherhood members and supporters.
[32] Mustafa Akyol, *Islam Without Extremes*: *A Muslim Case for Liberty* (W. W. Norton & Company (July 18, 2011).

[33] Multi-party elections are expensive – they involve hiring consultants, renting office space, printing newsletters, and paying for presence in the mass media. For this reason parties are often led and bankrolled by businesspeople.

[34] Yasmine El Rashidi, "Egypt on the Edge", New York Review of Books, 12 January 2012, accessed on 14 April 2012 at:
http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2012/jan/12/egypt-edge/

[35] Transitions were led by round table talks in Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, and East Germany. The round table talks in Eastern Europe failed to do, as they took place in the form of bargaining for the distribution of power and resources among old and new elites.