Revolutions and the Arab Spring: a comparative analysis between Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya

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Introduction

In December 2010 street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in front of a local governor’s office in Central Tunisia out of protest to the authorities who had confiscated his merchandise. Massive protests broke loose against the regime of President Ben Ali, which soon after fell. Subsequently, anti-government demonstrations spread like wildfire throughout the Arab World. After Ben Ali’s regime, Mubarak fell in Egypt, Gaddafi in Libya, and Bin Saleh in Yemen. Furthermore, heavy political turmoil is plaguing other Arab and Middle Eastern states like Syria, and Algeria. These unique events provide us with an opportunity to revisit theories on revolutions and their applicability to the revolutionary situations in the Arab World. How and why did these revolutionary situations come about?1

Many types of revolution can be discerned, the most important ones are social revolutions, which entail a drastic change in the class and state structure of society; political revolutions, which merely change the state institutions; and great revolutions which are a combination of the two aforementioned types of revolution but also entail a change in the state’s economic structure. I will focus my research on the occurrence of social revolutions in the Arab World from 2010 until 2011. I will use Theda Skocpol’s definition of social revolutions: “rapid, basic transformations of a society’s state and class structures, accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below.”2

Theories on revolutions have been manifold since the early twentieth century. They can be divided roughly into four generations: the natural-history approach, the general-theory approach, the structural approach, and the most recent generation that also takes into account culture, agency, and ideology in explaining revolutions. I draw on all four of these approaches to make a complete analysis of the causes of the revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. However, I rely mostly on the structural approach, which looks to patterns of relations between different classes in society, classes and the state, and the state and other states, as well as external pressures to explain revolutions.3

Research Question

I make a comparative analysis between the revolutions in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia to answer the follow question: To what extent can the revolutions in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya which occurred in 2010 and 2011 be explained by structural vulnerabilities on the state-level, for example weaknesses in personalist authoritarian regimes, economic contradictions, and external pressures?

3Skocpol, States and social revolutions, p.9-24
Social and Scientific Significance of the Research Question

This question is important to ask because it provides us with a unique opportunity to revisit existing theories on revolutions and test their applicability to the revolutionary situations in the Arab World. As stated above there are four generations of theorizing on revolutions. Skocpol and Foran are part of the third generation, which emphasizes structure at the cost of agency. Skocpol’s theories have proven to have a lot of explanatory value when it comes to explaining the structural causes of great revolutions, like the Great Revolutions in France, Russia, and China. Foran has mainly focused his research on instances of revolutions in Latin America and the Third World.

However, North Africa and the Middle East have not been subject to a lot of theorizing on revolutions. Perhaps this is because we have not witnessed a lot of instances of revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East in the past decennia up until now. The recent wave of revolutions in the Arab World provides us with a chance to test if Skocpol’s and Foran’s theories hold up in these regions as well. Furthermore, the current wave of protests and demonstrations has been named the Arab Spring in contemporary writing, but is it fair to talk about the situations in these different countries as if they were all the same? A comparative analysis will tell us more about the similarities as well as the differences between these unique cases.

Also, the scientific significance of this thesis does not just pertain to the geographical scope of the theories of Foran and Skocpol. It also has a temporal dimension, relating to the changing balance of power in the international states system, and technological developments. The revolutions Skocpol describes all took place in a multipolar world, except the Chinese Revolution, which took place in a bipolar world system. Most of the revolutions Foran describes took place at the end of the Cold War or the beginning of American hegemony in the international state system. The revolutions we are now witnessing are taking place in a period of prolonged American hegemony. At the same time, this balance of power is shaking: American hegemony is no longer self-evident, it is challenged by the rise of powers such as Russia, and China. Do Foran’s and Skocpol’s theories hold up under different systems? If yes, this makes Skocpol’s and Foran’s theories stronger. If not, we should consider the balance of power as a factor in future analyses on revolutionary situations.

Next to this, technology has taken a flight in the last couple of decades, refining means of communication and transportation, and also making these means less costly and thus more accessible to a larger share of the world population. The revolutions we are studying all took place in a time where social media is readily available to anyone with an internet connection, or even internet café in his or her neighborhood. This research also takes these factors into consideration, making the analyses more comprehensive and more contemporary.

Lastly, we have failed to see most revolutions coming. The Arab Spring for example, was not even predicted by most scholars of revolutions, or the Middle East. If we can understand how and why revolutions come about, perhaps it will be easier to predict them. This in turn could have implications for internationally operating companies, or international organizations, for example those doing humanitarian work. Countries like the Netherlands, and institutions like the United Nations, which have incorporated the principal of
Responsibility to Protect in their policies over the last couple of years could also benefit from good analyses on potentially revolutionary situations in order to help the ruling regime to successfully implement reforms in order to avoid the potential excesses of violent political conflict, like war crimes, and ethnic cleansing.

Research Design and Methodology
I answer the question above by first mapping out existing theories on revolutions. What variables can we find in contemporary writing on revolutions that we might be able to use to analyze the current situation in the Arab World? Which structural factors are of importance, internally, and on the international plane? I use these variables to make a comparative analysis between the revolutionary situations in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia. By using a Boolean truth table I investigate to what extent the potential causal variables are present in all three cases. I will explain later in this essay what a truth table entails.

The reason I compare Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya is because the revolutions in these countries have reached a temporary conclusion by the dissolution of the former regime (even though in some cases it has reared its head again, like in Egypt) and the subsequent occurrence of free and fair elections. Furthermore, they are very similar in a lot of important respects, which makes it easier to compare to what extent the variables necessary for a revolution to come about were present in these countries in 2010-2011 and if these variables are of crucial importance for a revolution to come about.

The presence of the variables I research in the above-mentioned cases are derived from Skocpol’s States and Social Revolutions and John Foran’s theory on revolutionary success in the Third World. He builds on Skocpol’s structuralism, by making exclusionary, personalist regimes, and dependent development two core variables, that have to be present to a certain extent for a revolution to come about. The presence of a personalist, exclusionary regime I measure by looking at the extent to which the regime is dependent on one person, or a family or dynasty. Also, I look at whom has influence over the government’s decision-making process, and if there is room for opposition.4

According to Baker authoritarian regimes are characterized by a lack of political pluralism and true democratic institutions through which the people can make their various demands and grievances known. Oftentimes, these characteristics are accompanied by the following traits: a highly centralized authority, and decision-making structures; presence of a control structure to stifle dissent and maintain order; top-down rule from the leader to the masses through use of a wide-spread bureaucracy; a large civil service sector to represent the state all the way down to the local levels of society; prevalence of nepotism over merit; wide-spread corruption; patron-client relationships between the leader and the elite; and a lack of horizontal political checks.5

Barbera Geddes differentiates between three main types of authoritarian regimes: military, single-party, and personalist authoritarian regimes. To find out what kind of authoritarian regime type one is dealing

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4 J. Foran, 'The future of revolutions at the fin-de-siècle', Third World Quarterly, 18 (5) 1997, p.791-820; B.Geddes, 'Authoritarian breakdown', Department of Political Science UCLA, 2004, p.4-6
with, she poses two questions: Who decides who gets access to office, and who controls policy? Obviously, in military regimes, the military controls these aspects of the political process, and in single-party regimes, the dominant political party does. However, the personalist authoritarian regime is special, in that access to the center of political power, and policy making hinges fully on the discretion of the individual ruler.6

After analyzing to what extent the former regimes in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya are personalist authoritarian regimes, I measure the extent of dependent development in our case studies. Dependent development is a phenomenon often witnessed in Third World-countries which is also known as “growth within limits.” It means that there is a growth in GNP, and output, but also rising inflation, and unemployment, and other factors that usually impact the lower classes harder than other classes in society. This type of development is an especially potent creator of grievances because people’s expectations rise as a consequence of the objectively measured growth, but are not met for a very large part of the population. I analyze data from the three case studies, looking at the growth of the GNP of the last decades. Also, I look at the inflation, and unemployment rates and research if every segment of the population is hit equally hard by this dependent development, and if not, which groups are hit harder.7

The above-mentioned types of regime are especially weak, and prone to revolutionary situations, because as already mentioned all the political and economic grievances people have, are directed towards one person. Furthermore, according to Geddes, regime types like these are usually based upon a delicate balancing by the leader of different groups and their interests, like the elite, the military and party cadres, against each other, which means that if one group’s support to the regime diminishes, the entire house of cards might collapse. This could happen for example when an economic crisis hinders the leader to successfully continue its system of patron-client relationships with a group in society that supports the regime, and this group decides to withdraw that support. And lastly, because the entire system is orchestrated around the leader, he might take the whole regime down with him in case of death or illness.8

Lastly, there has to be present a permissive context for a revolution to succeed. The presence of the above-mentioned structural determinants is not enough. These factors we can witness in a number of countries, where a revolution still has not happened. There has to be some sort of trigger, the spark that lights the flame burning down the entire old order. According to scholars like Skocpol, Foran, and Goldstein, oftentimes we can witness a crisis of the state, like an economic downturn right before a revolutionary situation breaks out. Has the financial and economic crisis of the last couple of years exacerbated the economic situation in our case-studies to the extent that people were actually motivated to go out on the street and demand the downfall of the regime? Did the economic crisis weaken the regime enough for the opposition to succeed? In order to answer these questions we have to look at data like the change in these states’ GNP, inflation, and unemployment numbers of the last years.9

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6 B.Geddes, ‘Authoritarian breakdown’, Department of Political Science UCLA, 2004, p.4-6
In the same vein, I research the presence of what Goodwin calls “the Gorbachev factor.” When Gorbachev introduced his policy of glasnost and perestroika in the second half of the 1980’s it was clear that the Soviet Union was no longer going to guarantee political order in the entire region. The leaders of the different Soviet states were thus no longer backed by the Soviet Union. This “let-up of external controls” of the dominant power in Eastern Europe, gave the opposition the chance to seize power and replace the ancien régime dependent on the Soviet Union, with a new one.¹⁰

Since the Second World War, the United States have been the dominant power in the Middle East. What is the role of the United States in the Arab Spring? We need to look at newspaper articles in the United States, at US positions in the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council and notes by the State Department to find out if there was actually a permissive world-context enabling the revolutionaries to freely pursue their agenda without being constrained by the United States. The EU’s role however, has also grown significantly in the Middle East as trade relations and security cooperation has intensified. We also analyze its role in the revolutions where appropriate.

Lastly, I analyze the role of new international developments on the revolutionary situations in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. In the first place I take a look at the usage of social media like Twitter and Facebook and its influence on the revolutions. I also analyze if the revolution in Tunisia had any influence on the revolutions in Egypt, and Libya. As Skocpol notes: “some aspects of “modernization” have been unique processes affecting the world as a whole”, and “actors in later revolutions may be influenced by developments in earlier ones.”¹¹

After I have researched the presence of the above-mentioned variables in each of the cases, I will construct a Boolean truth table. A truth table is a binary representation of the presence or absence of the variables (thus ‘1’ stands for ‘presence’, and ‘0’ stands for ‘absence’), which allows us to detect certain patterns amongst our cases. This technique, brought forth by the School of Comparative Social Research has its origins in substantive comparative studies, like States and Social Revolutions, and John Stuart Mill’s method of agreement and disagreement. It is championed by its most well-known scholar, Charles Ragin. He successfully tried to bridge the gap between quantitative statistical methods and qualitative comparative methods. He found that the quantitative method, such as multivariate statistical analysis is variable-oriented, and hence misses important research questions, and is abstract. Conversely, he found that qualitative approaches are case-driven, and complex. A Boolean truth table allows us to look at complex data in an orderly way, and to analyse cases as subsets of different variables, instead of one complex entity. Furthermore, quantitative analysis needs a large sample size in order for its outcomes to be reliable. Comparative analyses, especially cross-national analyses usually only have a few variables, and cases which are studied. Ragin’s method allows us to test cases like these with statistical methods, without losing sight of the complexity and uniqueness of each of the cases. In the end, a Boolean truth table will reveal salient patterns, permitting us to see which patterns of variables have actually caused the revolutions in the Arab

¹¹ T.Skocpol, States and Social Revolutions, p.23
World, but also we can carefully draw some general conclusions about which factors are necessary for a revolution to come about.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{12} J. Foran, 'The future of revolutions at the fin-de-siècle', \textit{Third World Quarterly}, 18 (5) 1997, p.807; M. Vancea, ‘Ressenyes’, Department of Political and Social Sciences, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, 2006, p. 299-301
Theoretical Framework

According to Goldstone, modern theorizing on revolutions began in the 1920’s and 1930’s with scholars such as Edwards, Pettee, and Brinton, who studied the Great Revolutions, like the American Revolution of 1776, the French Revolution (1789), the English Revolution (1640), and the 1917 Russian Revolution. They studied the Great Revolutions in detail and tried to distill patterns and stages that these revolutions had in common. From this they drew up law-like empirical generalizations, meant to be applicable to all revolutions in the past, and the future. Because of their method, “analogous to that of the natural historians of biology, who sought to identify common stages and patterns in the development of life”, these scholars are referred to as Natural Historians.\(^{13}\)

The school of Natural History has brought scholars studying revolutions some important insight into the process of revolutions. From studying these Great Revolutions Brinton, Pettee, and like-minded academics gathered that revolutions always seem to follow the same path as Goldstone describes very aptly. It starts with intellectuals ceasing to support the regime. The state then tries to meet the criticism of the intellectuals by proposing reforms, but by this time it is often already too late for the regime: the wheels of revolutions have been set in motion. The spark that lights the flame is some kind of crisis brought on by the government’s inability to deal with a pressing economic, military, or political matter. The revolutionary opposition takes this opportunity to gain strength, but it is not for long that cracks in the seemingly united oppositional front start to show. The moderates are usually the first to seize power, but because of their propensity for continuity they soon make the same mistakes as their predecessors and are moved aside by the more radical factions of the opposition. These take extreme measures both in changing the structure of the state as well as in trying to maintain order by sheer coercion. After order is restored, a period of pragmatism commences, and the new leaders start to concentrate on economic development and progress within the framework of the new state institutions.\(^{14}\)

The beauty of these works lies in the great detail and historical accuracy writers as Edwards employ. Also, the law-like empirical generalizations can be used as a guidance for scholars particularly interested in the process of revolutions. However, the Natural History-school tells us nothing about why revolutions come about; it presents us with mere observations. And as Kenneth Waltz so pointedly says: “Observation and experience never lead to direct knowledge of causes.” Furthermore, these works were drawn up in the beginning of the twentieth century when mankind had been confronted with only a few instances of revolutions. Since then we have been presented with so much more instances, notably revolutions in the South. The Natural Historians use a Eurocentric point of view which cannot be applied that easily to those instances. Lastly, these observations also tell us fairly little about the outcome of revolutionary situations.\(^{15}\)


In reaction to the aforementioned criticisms of the Natural History-school, a new school developed after the Second World War, which attempted to develop general theories on revolutions. These theories have been sub-grouped by leading theorists such as Skocpol, and Goldstone into three categories: the aggregate-psychological theories, systems-value consensus theories, and political-conflict theories. Aggregate psychological theories try to explain the occurrence of instances of political violence, amongst which revolutions, by looking to people’s psychological motivations. This approach is also known as the relative deprivation-theory, developed by Davies and Gurr. Their premise is that people can accept misery and oppression, as long as that is what they expect from life. If in any way the people’s expectations are raised, and subsequently frustrated because the government cannot realize those heightened expectations, people become violent or join oppositional movements. An important condition is that this relative deprivation touches both the masses as well as the ranks of the elite. Furthermore, relative deprivation can be material as well as ideational.16

The second group is the system/value-theories, championed by Chalmers Johnson in his book Revolutionary Change. Adherents to this school purport that one has to look at society as a whole in order to explain societal change. Normally, society is a “value-coordinated social-system”, made up of institutions that represent the core societal values of the majority of the members of that society. If for whatever reason a dis-synchronization sets in between the dominant values in society and environment, people become disoriented and amenable to alternative, maybe even radical values. The regime then loses its legitimacy and has to resynchronize values and environment by implementing reforms. If the government fails to do this, and instead chooses to rest upon her means of coercion, any crisis, like an economic downturn or military defeat will create enough of an opening for the opposition to bring her down and resynchronize values and environment herself.17

Charles Tilly, however, argues that discontent and conflict are part of any political process. The factors that make a political conflict potentially revolutionary are the means of organization and the number of resources available to the opposition. More specifically, whether collective action against the regime is successful depends on group interests, the degree of organization, the amount of resources under collective control, and the opportunities and threats the opposition members face. If an opposition group has a high enough degree of organization and enough resources to control a geographic area and effectively take power from the regime, a situation of multiple sovereignty will ensue. This means that the population can choose to provide resources, amongst which armed men and money, to an alternative body than their government. This in turn provides the opposition with a chance to displace the current government.18

As might have become clear these general-theory approaches focus mainly on the opposition. Why are the people rebelling? When will they rise up against their government? And what makes an opposition group successful? The problem with this approach is that it says nothing about why revolutionary situations do come about in certain states and in others they do not. From this it stems that one cannot solely look to the

17 Skocpol, *States and social revolutions*, (New York 1975), p.11-12
opposition and its resources and motives to explain revolutions. To really find out why revolutions come about, we also have to look at the states themselves. We have to make a comparison between the structures of the states which have been in a revolutionary situation, and see if we can find commonalities.

With Theda Skocpol’s groundbreaking work *States and Social Revolutions* theorizing on revolutions made leaps forward. She attributes the coming about of revolutions to structural vulnerabilities on the state-level, accompanied by external pressures, leading to “the disintegration of centralized administrative and military machineries that had theretofore provided the sole unified bulwark of social and political order. No longer reinforced by the prestige and coercive power of autocratic monarchy, the existing class relations become vulnerable to assaults from below.” These structural vulnerabilities can be traced back to two relationships which are central to Skocpol’s analysis: 1.) the relation between the Dominant Class (landed elite) and the peasants (or producing class), and 2.) the relation between the Dominant Class and the state. In times of heightened transnational competition (for example caused by modernization pressures) and/or fiscal crises, the state can overcome these crises and prevent collapse by implementing reforms. However, if the Dominant Class has access to government, it might block the government from implementing reforms disadvantageous to their interests, like the abolishment of tax exemptions for the privileged in Louis XIV’s France. Also, depending on how strong the Dominant Class is in the countryside politically speaking, the state might not be able to implement reforms increasing productivity in order to overcome the crisis. In this case, the interests of the state are incompatible with the interests of the Dominant Class. This in turn leads to insurrection of the elite, which immobilizes the state. This makes the state and existing class relations vulnerable to revolts from below.\(^\text{19}\)

Skocpol departs from a Marxist standpoint, by using structure and class-conflict as two of the main important features in her research on revolutions in France, Russia, and China. However, as Kimmel and Himmelstein sharply note in their review of Skocpol’s famous work: she then differentiates herself from Marxists theories by contending their voluntarist premise. Where Lenin and Gramsci for example, argue that the role of the vanguard party and individuals is crucial in making a revolution succeed, Skocpol says that it is not agency but structural factors internally, as well as on the international plane that lead to revolutionary situations. It is the conjuncture of these internal contradictions, combined with external pressures that make a significant change in the structure of the state, and class relations possible. What Skocpol furthermore did to advance theories on revolutions is to treat the state as an autonomous player in the revolutionary struggles she describes.\(^\text{20}\)

Groundbreaking as Skocpol’s theory might be, it has also been criticized heavily. The main points of criticism are that she compares very different states in completely different time-periods; that she neglects the role of the urban forces in revolutionary situations; but most important of all that she emphasizes structure at the cost of agency. Hence in reaction to Skocpol and her fellow scholars a fourth generation of theories on revolution started to develop, in which agency, ideology and culture started to play a role again.

\(^{19}\) Skocpol, 1975, p.47-51

Ironically, it was the “psychological reductionism of second-generation theorists (…) typically criticized as too purposive” that led to Skocpol’s heavy structuralism.\footnote{J. Foran, ‘Theories of revolution revisited: towards a fourth generation?’, Sociological Theory, 11 (1) 1993, p.4 and p.7; J.L. Himmelstein and M.S. Kimmel, ‘Review Essay: States and Social Revolutions: The implications and limits of Skocpol’s Structural Model’, American Journal of Sociology, 86 (5) 1981, p.1153}

Foran builds on Skocpol’s structuralist theory: he focuses on relations between classes and the dominant class and the state. However, he enriches Skocpol’s theory with agency, creating a synthetic approach. According to Foran a combination of certain factors needs to be present in order for a revolution to be successful. He argues that the following structural factors need to be present: a personalist, repressive exclusionary regime, dependent development, and a revolutionary crisis, in the form of an economic downturn, accompanied by a world-systemic opening. Like Skocpol, he believes that the combination of these structural political, economic and systemic factors lead to an opening leaving the state and dominant class vulnerable to revolts from below. However, Foran moves beyond Skocpol’s structuralism and incorporates political cultures of resistance and opposition as a key variable to explain how exactly oppositional groups make use of the “fissures” Skocpol is referring to in her theory.\footnote{J. Foran, ‘The future of revolutions at the fin-de-siècle’, Third World Quarterly, 18 (5) 1997, p.792-794; J. Foran, ‘The future of revolutions at the fin-de-siècle’, Third World Quarterly, 18 (5) 1997, p.792-793; F. Kuhnen, ‘Causes of underdevelopment and concepts for development- an introduction to development theories’, The Journal of Development Studies, (8) 1986, p.18-19}

He also explains in his theory what these variables entail, and why these particular factors need to be present in order for a revolution to succeed. Dependent development is also known as “growth within limits.” According to Foran this applies to certain Third World economies that are experiencing a high level of economic development, as indicated by high GDP numbers, increases in foreign trade, and agricultural and industrial output, and at the same time are experiencing a high level of inflation, debt, and overburdened social infrastructure, like schools, and growing income inequality for example. It comes forth out of internal structural deformations, which in turn have been created by former political and military dependency of colonies on industrial countries. Oftentimes, the indigenous lifestyle, and economy have been destroyed and the country in question forced into the existing international division of labour, favoring the industrialized countries. These have changed the societies of peripheral countries as there has now come about an economy oriented towards the needs of the industrial countries, instead of the societies’ needs. This leads to stratification, as the relations between the industrialized country and the peripheral country are reproduced in the former colony in the form of a center and dependent periphery. The elite conforms to the status quo and accepts the norms and values of the industrialized countries, while the masses are becoming more and more marginalized.\footnote{J. Foran, ‘Theories of revolution revisited: towards a fourth generation?’, Sociological Theory, 11 (1) 1993, p.4 and p.7; J.L. Himmelstein and M.S. Kimmel, ‘Review Essay: States and Social Revolutions: The implications and limits of Skocpol’s Structural Model’, American Journal of Sociology, 86 (5) 1981, p.1153}

Development and underdevelopment do not cause social dislocation to such an extent, according to Foran. Development is defined as “the capacity of a national economy whose initial economic condition has been more or less static for a long time, to generate and sustain an annual increase in its GDP at rates perhaps from 5% to 7% or more”, accompanied by a decrease in unemployment, poverty, and inequality. Underdevelopment is characterized as “a relative condition in which a society lacks autonomous capacity to control and mobilize socio-economic formation for a sustainable growth and development necessary to effect
physical, mental, material, and technological fulfillment without dependence on external stimuli.” Unlike dependent development extreme stratification and the development of a *comprador bourgeoisie* are less likely in these scenario’s, and thus carry less of a risk to produce severe social disruption.²⁴

A personalist, repressive exclusionary regime usually goes hand in hand with dependent development according to Foran. Foran argues that these regimes fuel the grievances created by dependent development. They often breed broad multi-class alliances, as the head of the regime (usually a dictator) his power is based on repression, and he not only excludes the lower classes, but also the economic elite, and middle class from political participation. This is why the presence of such a type of regime is important for the coming about of revolutions: there needs to be a broad-based cross-class coalition in order for the revolutionary crisis to gain momentum. If the leader still has the support of one or more classes in society, a revolution is less likely to succeed.²⁵

Next to this, there needs to be present a revolutionary crisis, writes Foran, “that both weakens the state and emboldens the opposition.” According to Foran this entails an economic downturn accompanied by a world-systemic opening. Economic downturns serve to sharpen the grievances people already have vis-à-vis the government. A world-systemic opening is described by Foran as the “letting up of external controls by the dominant outside power”, also described as the ‘Gorbachev-factor’ by Goodwin, as can be read above. This can be caused by distraction of dominant powers, for example by wars or economic crises, or rivalries between two or more great powers. According to Foran this conjuncture is necessary for a revolutionary movement to succeed. It is necessary because it gives oppositional movements enough room to maneuver to carry through the revolution, without being constrained by the government or the particular workings of the international state system.²⁶

The last variable, political cultures of resistance and opposition, has to do with the role of agency in revolutions. The factors mentioned above create an opening, which can be used in order to instigate significant changes in the social and political structure of a state. However, there needs to be an opposition able to do this. This opposition needs to be broad-based and unified, otherwise it is hardly possible to mobilize enough people against the state. The opposition draws upon sources such as ideas, nationalism, democracy and religion to mobilize society. If they are successful in using cultural frameworks, ideas, and ideology to mobilize enough groups, and classes against the state, this means the difference between the success or failure of a revolution, notes Foran.²⁷

The synthetic approach Foran is using can best be explained by an example. Foran has studied the revolution in Mexico in 1994, which I will relay below. The Mexican economy was booming for a long time, from 1940 until 1980, until dependent development set in. The ruling party, IRP, centered around President Gortari, was losing legitimacy because of its growing relationship with the United States, and participation in the North-Atlantic Free Trade Agreement, which a lot of Mexicans saw as the cause of their worsening

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²⁵ J. Foran, 'The future of revolutions at the fin-de-siècle', *Third World Quarterly*, 18 (5) 1997, p. 792-793
²⁶ J. Foran, 'The future of revolutions at the fin-de-siècle', *Third World Quarterly*, 18 (5) 1997, p. 793-794
²⁷ J. Foran, 'The future of revolutions at the fin-de-siècle', *Third World Quarterly*, 18 (5) 1997, p. 793
economic situation. When the opposition threatened to win the elections on a platform of economic reform and poverty reduction, the IRP stole the elections, and committed numerous human rights violations in the process. To summarize the situation, there thus was a personalist, repressive, authoritarian regime in power in Mexico, accompanied by an economy suffering from dependent development. The grievances of the people were sharpened by the economic crisis of 1994, which made it possible for the opposition group EZLN to gain widespread support amongst the population. This group, originating in the region of Chiapas, their demands were met with harsh military repression, generating even more sympathy for them amongst the population. Also, the population could agree with their demands for reforms, as not only the people of Chiapas were suffering but the entire Mexican population: “Chiapas is Mexico.” The broad-based coalition that was mobilized by EZLN ultimately managed to compel the government to negotiate. Although the struggle between Chiapas and the Mexican government has still not been concluded, this is a good example of how a revolutionary momentum can come about and why it is necessary for opposition groups to seize this momentum. Foran first describes the conjuncture of political, economic, and revolutionary crises according to the structuralist approach and then moves on to the voluntarist approach using agency to explain how this momentum was used by the opposition to actually carry through a revolution. This synthetic approach gives us a comprehensive overview of how a revolution can come about.  

The synthetic approach is an option to solve the agent-structure problem in International Relations. The agent-structure debate in International Relations is not a debate about which of these two variables explains specific instances of human behavior, such as regime change. As Wendt states it “has its origins in two truisms about social life which underlie most social scientific inquiry: 1.) human beings and their organizations are purposeful actors whose actions help reproduce or transform the society in which they live; and 2.) society is made up of social relationships, which structure the interactions between these purposeful actors. Taken together these truisms suggests that human agents and social structures are, in one way or another, theoretically interdependent or mutually implicating entities.”

Snyder and Mahoney explain in their article on Rethinking Agency and Structure in the Study of Regime Change the fundamental differences between these approaches. First and foremost the difference lies in the conception of structure, and agency, and the conceptual base of the voluntarist, and structural approach. While structuralists employ an oversocialized concept of agency, voluntarists employ an undersocialized one. Structuralists conceive of structure as generative, and voluntarists as constraining. This means that structuralists see structure as “necessary relations internalized by actors, from which their interest, identities, and goals derive”, while voluntarists see structure as “contingent constraints that potentially limit the ability of actors to achieve their goals”, and that actors pre-exist structures, in that their ideas and interests are formed before that they have been constrained by structure.

30 J. Mahoney and R. Snyder, ‘Rethinking agency and structure in the study of regime change’, Studies in Comparative International Development, Summer 1999, p. 5-8
Thus a structuralist would not deny the role of agency in constituting change, just as a voluntarist would not deny the role of structure. However, the truisms Wendt formulated do pose an ontological problem: what exactly is structure and how are structure and agency interrelated? He solves this problem by making one variable ontologically primitive or by making both of them ontologically equal. Structuralists make agency ontologically primitive, while voluntarists make structure ontologically primitive. The approach one chooses to take oftentimes depends on the lens through which one chooses to look at the world. In any case it is important to understand the fundamental differences in these approaches, and the corresponding strengths and weaknesses. Next to this, it is important to realize that different kinds of cases require different approaches. Which one to take, is dependent on the case.31

Snyder and Mahoney, in trying to develop a synthetic approach, distinguish between four building blocks of the voluntarist and structural approach, namely the primary explanatory variable, temporal focus, use of comparison, and level of analysis. In the voluntarist approach the primary explanatory variable are the subjective evaluations of the key actors who make the transitions, in the structuralist approach objective conditions are. Voluntarists employ a short term temporal focus, meaning that they only focus on the temporal frame in which the change is actually constituted, because they assume pre-existing social conditions do not explain behavior. Structuralists on the other hand, believe that social structures were there before the actors, and constitute their ideas and interests. For them a long range temporal focus is of the essence as the causes of the transition can usually be found in a structure which has been developing over years, or longer. Voluntarists employ an idiographic method of comparison, meaning that the focus lies on the uniqueness of the cases in point, while structuralists try to make generalizations which can be applied to a number of cases, also known as the nomothetic comparative method. Lastly, the level of analysis in the voluntarist approach is the micro-level, as it focuses on social groups, and leadership, while structuralists focus on the macro-structural, and domestic structural levels. Examples of variables on these levels are: world-system position, or the bourgeoisie.32

It is not easy overcoming the ontological problems associated with a synthetic approach. However, the fourth generation of revolutionary theorizing is trying to do exactly that, because both approaches have their weaknesses, which can be deducted from the features mentioned above. Voluntarists fail to make generalizations, while structuralists make generalizations up to the point that they lose sight of the uniqueness of their cases. The structural approach is richer, in that it looks at the historical context as well, and deems it significant, while for voluntarists, this is merely a background variable. Lastly, the structural approach neglects the role of individuals or groups in constituting change.

Theda Skocpol is a convinced structuralist. Taking her analysis of the French Revolution as an example, one can see clearly she has taken the structuralist approach. She explains the French Revolution by pointing out the structural political, and economic contradictions on the state-level, accompanied by external pressures. France became an absolutist monarchy in 1643 under Louis XIV. Instead of imposing new

controls, controls were simply imposed next to already existing controls, guaranteeing “the very socio-political institutional forms- seignoral, corporate, provincial- whose original functions it replaced or superseded.” In the meanwhile, the ruling family the Bourbons, undertook a military campaign in Europe with the goal of making France a hegemonic power in Europe. The wars depleted France’s treasure chest, and soon the King tried to raise taxes, abolish tax exemptions for the privileged, and borrowed money at high interest rates from private lenders. However, the people benefitting the most from this tax system belonged to the dominant class, which also had access to office, like the parlements (municipal bodies of representation). They successfully resisted reforms, and started to challenge the regime by calling for a convention of the Estates-General (comparable in functions and structure to the Dutch Parliament for example).  

Next to this incumbent political crisis, France started to lag behind other European powers economically speaking. While competitors such as Great-Britain successfully dealt with the pressures of modernization (such as the Industrial Revolution), the King could not get any reforms of the ground because of the complex system of entangled interests and controls of the Dominant Class, which appropriated surpluses from the peasants directly, and indirectly. Agricultural growth was stunted, and also started to adversely affect other sectors, such as manufacturing.  

France’s support of the American War of Independence was the final straw that unraveled the absolutist monarchy. The King was knee-deep indebted to private lenders, and had to deal with an economic recession at the same time. Before, the state had frequently defaulted on private loans, when it was not able to pay them back to the lenders. However, the Dominant Class in Louis XIV’s France was not so much based on estate, as it was on propriety and office. A lot of the private lenders were the same people who held office in the parlements that threatened to convene the Estates-General. While the King resisted the convention of the Estates-General, he could not prevent administrative and military breakdown, and was subsequently unable to suppress popular uprisings. When the Estates-General did finally convene, they could not reach agreement on the future of the structure of government, resulting in even more popular discontent. Uprisings swept the nation, and protestors took over administrative control of municipalities and formed militias. In 1789 Bastille was stormed, and the Parisian National Assembly formed, heralding a new era in French politics.  

As can be seen above, Skocpol attributes the revolution to the conjuncture of these causes on the macro-structural, and domestic structural level: she focuses on the international state system, the state, and classes. France had difficulties coping with new, significant historical developments, like modernization. Politically, it was impossible for the King to implement reforms because he needed the support of the people who had a vested interest against reforms, namely the landed elite or Dominant Class. Economically, its treasure was empty, and a recession was slowing down growth. Had it not been for the external pressures that the King had to cope with on top of the political and economic upheavals, he might have been able to subvert the revolutionary pressures, but the war and economic competition with foreign powers constrained his

33 Skocpol, 1975, p. 51-67  
34 Skocpol, 1975, p. 51-67  
35 Skocpol, 1975, p. 51-67
ability to successfully maneuver himself out of the crisis. That is what Skocpol means when she says that states back themselves into revolutions.

What is also interesting to see, is that historical context plays a prominent role in her analysis. Both the historical development of the state of France culminating in the absolutist monarchy, and historical developments on the international plane, play a crucial part in explaining the French Revolution. Her temporal focus is long range, instead of a short range focus on just the window in which the revolution itself took place. Lastly, rich as her research may be, she is not concerned with the unique properties of the cases, her goal is to find generalizations about revolutions applicable to other instances of this phenomenon. The downside of this structural approach is that she overlooks the unique properties of this particular case. Also, she assumes that the classes she describes have interests and ideals determined by their respective class. That is an oversimplification of these groups, which are undoubtedly much more diverse that that.

Theorists of the fourth generation try to combine the best of both approaches. They do not discard structural theorizing as such, but they enrich it with theorizing about agency, culture, and ideology. Regarding agency Teodor Shanin says: revolutions “cannot be easily “operationalised” into factors, tables and figures….At the very centre of revolution lies an emotional upheaval of moral indignation, revulsion, and fury with the powers-that-be, such that one cannot demur or remain silent, whatever the cost.” Structuralism makes it seem as if revolutions are spontaneous, but there has to be an opposition that seizes the momentum the structural vulnerabilities on the state-level offers them. In the same vein, the role of ideology cannot be underestimated either, since it serves to bring together diverse groups of people, with diverse grievances to rise up together against the regime. According to Kamrava it also has the purpose of linking the emerging leaders of the revolutions to the ever-growing disgruntled masses.36

Lastly, cultural frameworks and how they are employed by revolutionaries or anti-revolutionaries can also be of crucial importance in the process and outcome of a revolutionary situation. Cultural frameworks are “long-standing background assumptions, values, myths, stories, and symbols that are widespread in the population.” Revolutionaries and anti-revolutionaries will use these cultural frameworks to justify their own actions, and denounce, or better yet vilify the actions of the other party. To the extent that these groups are successful in doing this, they will gain more popular support from the masses.37

Next to this trend of infusing structural theories with ideational notions, we have also seen a plethora of works focusing on Third World-revolutions in the last decennia of the twentieth century. These works, drawing upon the premises of the Fourth Generation, contend that certain types of regimes, breed certain types of revolts. Goodwin calls them “their own grave-diggers,” states that are: highly autonomous of relatively weakly organized domestic social classes, interests groups, and associations in civil society; economically dependent upon, and in many cases installed by foreign powers; indiscriminately repressive of

independent oppositional movements; and intimately implicated in the ownership or control of important economic sectors, if not the economy as a whole.” Because the rulers of the state are so intermeshed with every aspect of society, be it political or economic, the grievances the people have will necessarily be directed at them, and the people will tend to view the toppling of the regime as the only way to address those grievances.38

I believe both the structural, and the voluntarist approach can provide us with valuable information on why a revolution has come about. The efforts made to synthesize both approaches are also very valuable in the sense that they give us a more complete understanding of the causes of revolutions. However, I do feel that the synthesized approach makes the analyses too complex and extensive, and there is something to be said for elegant, albeit oversimplified theorizing, and analysis. It is not feasible in my perspective to give a comprehensive analysis in the sense of the synthetic approach, without losing some of the power of the refined causal reasoning the structuralist approach gives us.

That is not to say that we should not approach revolutions from a voluntarist perspective as well. As this approach focuses more on the micro-level, it is especially interesting for people interested in the process of revolutions, as voluntarists look to social movements and leaders to explain revolutions. I do not agree with the premise of voluntarists that these are pre-existing actors, whose ideas and interests exist before they encounter structure. We all encounter structure from the day we are born. The social class we are born in still, even in this day, even in the wealthy Western European continent, for a large part determines the opportunities and constraints we are faced with during our lifetime. The governments in most Western-European states ameliorate these affects, by attempting to create a level playing field, but that does not make for an equal society. The consequences of which social class one is born in are much more present in other regions even, like Africa, the United States, the Middle East and North Africa, and Latin America. Hence the interest and ideas of someone born in a specific social class will be different from someone born into another social class, as he or she is not faced with the same opportunities and constraints.

Furthermore, I think the voluntarist approach is too simplistic in employing a short range temporal focus. Again this goes back to the problem of what was there first? Structure or agency? According to voluntarists, structure is shaped by “ongoing interactions between purposeful actors”, while structuralists believe structure is pre-existing to actors and shapes their ideas and interests. As can be seen in Skocpol’s analysis of the French Revolution the seeds of popular discontent were there long before Bastille was stormed. The state structure which led to the political contradictions, which in combination with the economic contradictions, and external pressures, led to the revolution, was already there partially before Louis XIV even became King. Also, social movements and leaders might be the ones giving shape to popular uprisings with the help of ideas, ideologies, and cultural frameworks, but they need to have a systemic opening which allows them to mobilize, and carry through the revolution. Otherwise, let us say in the instance that the French king was not constrained by a depleted treasure and military adventures abroad, if he

was not constrained by the Dominant Class preventing him for executing reforms, why would the King not just intervene and crack down on the protests?

However, as I have stated above, which approach to take depends on what it is that you are researching. In this essay I make a comparative analysis between the causes of the revolutions in order to draw general conclusions which might also be applicable to other instances of revolutions. It follows that the structural approach is the most suited for this, as it does not focus on the unique aspects of a case but on the general patterns that can be distilled.

In analyzing my three cases I use structuralism as the vantage point, because I agree with Skocpol that the causes of revolutions lie in internal contradictions on the state-level, like extreme domestic state-autonomy, external dependence, exclusionary authoritarianism, and a politicized economy, combined with external pressures, like the economic downturn we have witnessed in the last couple of years. I believe that the structural causes mentioned above create an opening which, if effectively employed by revolutionary leaders, using cultural frameworks to justify their actions and denounce the actions of the state, and ideologies to tie together the myriad of grievances of different groups in society, can lead to a significant change in the political and social structure of the state. However, I focus on the structural causes only, as the length of this essay does not permit me to go in to the role of agency in full detail.

According to Foran most scholars of revolutions are in agreement about which factors lead to revolutionary situations. However, different scholars emphasize different aspects. He states that Goodwin, for example, focuses mostly on the particular structure of states vulnerable to revolutions. However, he continues, mostly the focus now lies on what “particular mix of causes is most useful as an explanation across cases?” In his article *The future of revolutions at the fin-de-siècle* he chooses a mix of structural and voluntarist potential causes, such as dependent development, a repressive, exclusionary, personalist state, powerful political cultures of resistance, an economic downturn, and a world-systemic opening.\(^{39}\)

I only focus on the structural variables for the reasons stated above. Furthermore, instead of analyzing the presence of an economic downturn and a world systemic opening, I research the presence of external pressures, which might be an economic downturn, but could also be military entanglements, the rise of new technologies and historical developments. Each of these external factors can combine with variables on the domestic structural level to create a window of opportunity for protestors to instigate a revolution. It is indeed the combination of factors, as Skocpol said, that lead to a revolution.\(^{40}\)

I analyze the extent to which the regimes are personalist, authoritarian and exclusionary regimes to research to what extent the regimes in question are vulnerable to political upheaval. I use Baker’s criteria on what constitutes as an authoritarian regime to establish to what extent the regimes in question are actually authoritarian. Then I analyze to what extent this has lead to the coming about of a revolution.

Secondly, I analyze to what extent the variable of dependent development is present in the cases. I will use this variable to establish to what extent economic contradictions are present in the case studies. An important part of Skocpol’s analysis is class-based revolt. Hence, it is important to know if economic

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\(^{39}\) J. Foran, ‘The future of revolutions at the fin-de-siècle’, *Third World Quarterly*, 18 (5) 1997, p. 792

\(^{40}\) Skocpol, 1975, p.47-51
Contradictions are present in the cases, as these oftentimes lay the seed for economic grievances. Dependent development measures the extent to which economic growth is present in a state, in combination with high inflation rates, debt, growing inequality, and overburdened housing, and educational infrastructures. It stands to reason that the lower classes would be the first and foremost to suffer from the negative consequences of too fast a growth of the economy, and the ones who get to share the least in the dividends this growth brings with it. This is especially true in a highly personalist regime, whereby the linkages between the regime and the business class are oftentimes very strong.41

Lastly, I research the presence of external factors. As we have seen above in Skocpol’s analysis of the French Revolution, the King was not able to suppress the popular uprisings because he had little room to maneuver (for example implement reforms), as this was constrained by an economic recession and war. This is usually the factor that changes the situation from before. Mostly, the political contradictions, and economic contradictions have been present already for a long time, but the state suppresses these grievances by sheer repression, clientalism, and patronage. However, as external pressures lay heavy on the regime these means become harder to employ. I research what kind of external factors we can differentiate in our cases, to what extent they were present, and how they helped to bring about a revolution.42

Theories on revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa before 2010 are hard to find, simply because there have not been many instances of revolutions in the Arabic countries in the past decennia. Theorizing on the Middle East and North Africa has been manifold and diverse, and has taken great leaps forward in the past century. In the following section I describe the development of these theories. The three countries studied in the case studies are relatively new nation-states. As Anderson describes in her article ‘Creative destruction’: States, identity, and legitimacy in the Arab World these states have been born out of the rubble of the Ottoman Empire, and built up according to Western standards and ideas on what constitutes as a nation-state ‘worthy’ or ‘ready’ to enter civilization. The European powers who had a mandate to rule over the region that was the Ottoman Empire until that time, endowed the newly demarcated territorial units with a large administrative system, but also police forces, European weights and measure systems, schools, markets, railroads, and ports, amongst other things, reshaping “many of the most fundamental aspects of life.” However, due to the artificial nature of these territorial demarcations, and the focus of the European powers on status and prestige in the final phase of colonialism instead of industrialization, by the time these countries actually gained independence after World War II they still were not ready to “enter civilization” according to the standards as formulated by the League of Nations. Nevertheless, the former colonial powers had been fatigued by the war, their resources depleted, so that they were all too happy to let go of the responsibilities the mandates brought with them.43

Tellingly, by the mid-1970’s the industrial output of the region was a mere 1.5% of the total industrial output of the world. This is also a consequence of the large welfare states the European powers had imposed upon the region. Fearing nationalist tensions and destabilization of the region, they made social

41 J. Foran, ‘The future of revolutions at the fin-de-siècle’, Third World Quarterly, 18 (5) 1997, p.792
42 Skocpol, 1975, p. 51-67;
welfare one of the pillars of the government apparatuses. After independence, the new independent rulers inherited this generous services and subsidy system, and used this to foster sovereignty and prosperity in their respective countries. Unconstrained by a tradition or legacy of domestic accountability, and fueled by the continued in pouring of funds of the former colonial powers, and the new superpowers, who had an ongoing interest in stability in the region, the regimes were able to control the state relatively unchallenged, and were not confronted with strong pressures to industrialize.44

However, argues Anderson, the European powers and the newly independent rulers of these nation-states were not able to create a strong nationalist identity, and to render alternative identities and loyalties, like kinship, tribes, and family, which had existed before the imposition of Western style nation states in the region, obsolete. Also, they failed to take into account the negative consequences of the demographic developments these policies stimulated, such as overburdened schooling and housing infrastructures, and high unemployment rates. And thus, the failure of these states to generate actual economic development, and to provide for the people, made that the people kept on relying on these alternative structures and loyalties to meet their needs, continually challenging the nation-state as such. It is from these contradictions on the state-level that the current upheavals in the Arab World stem, amongst other things.45

The perceived backwardness of these Arab states in terms of what it constitutes to be a nation ‘worthy’ or ‘ready’ to enter the civilization of Western style states, made that theorizing on the Middle East and North Africa in terms of political stability, economic development, and the influences of external pressures on the region, in the first decennia of their independence was mainly focused on the theme of modernization or development theorizing. This type of theorizing starts from the assumption that ‘traditional’ states can develop itself, along the path of developed nations, into a modern society. Influential scholars have been Rostow, who has described the stages of economic growth on the path to modernization, and Organski, who has described four political stages in the process of nation building. The experience of Western European nations, and North America serves as a model for modernization, and successful integration into the global market economy in this theory.46

Polk, for example, argues that no government can survive which does not espouse the cause of modernization. Key aspects of this social transformation are the creation of a modern industrial society; a new power elite possessing the technical skills to assert themselves in this new modern context; the dissolving of the traditional isolation of the Middle East, as the barriers that have separated it culturally and educationally from the rest of the world are broken down due to the increasing westernization of the population; and an alteration in the relation between state and society, whereby the state is not just involved in defense and security of the people, but seeks the active support of its populace by performing tasks outside of that narrow responsibility as well. He takes Egypt as an example and predicts that Egypt’s middle class

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will grow from hundreds in 1952 to close to three million in 1975. Egypt will have managed to accomplish this, according to Polk, by modernizing its education system and making military service compulsory for young men. He argues that these developments will create a large middle class, which in turn will impact upon Egypt’s entry into the age of modernization. He emphasizes that it is the industrialization, education, and militarization programs of the Middle Eastern and North African states that will stimulate modernization, but also cause the need for political change, thus highlighting the link between industrialization and economic development, and political freedom, characteristic of modernization theories.47

As a result of perceived liberalization in the Middle East, and North Africa in the first half of the 1990’s, and the Third Wave of democratization, in the form of the independence of the former Soviet states, scholars began to study the region from a democratization theory perspective. They focused mainly on the question as to why the Middle East and North Africa had not democratized yet. According to Huntington, one of the most cited scholars in the field of democratization theory, five factors have contributed to the occurrence and timing of Third Wave transitions: “the deepening legitimacy problems of authoritarian regimes in a world where democratic values are widely accepted”, “the unprecedented global economic growth of the 1960’s, which … greatly expanded the urban middle class in many countries”, “a striking shift in the doctrine and activities of the Catholic Church … and the transformation of national Catholic churches from defenders of the status quo to opponents of authoritarianism”, “changes in the policies of external actors”, and ““Snowballing,” or the demonstration effect of transitions earlier in the third wave in stimulating and providing models for subsequent efforts at democratization.” Huntington has examined the opportunities for and obstacles to democracy in regions that have not seen democratization yet. He divides these countries into four geocultural groups, amongst which “Islamic countries stretching from Morocco to Indonesia.” He poses that Islam rejects a distinction between the religious and political community and that “to the extent that governmental legitimacy and policy flow from religious doctrine and religious expertise, Islamic concepts of politics differ from and contradict the premises of democratic politics.”48

Such cultural explanations of why there is a lack of democracy in the MENA have long since been rejected. Also, theorizing on the Middle East from a democratization perspective has been largely rejected, because as Albrecht and Schlumberger pose: it is hard to research something that is not there. Instead it would be more fruitful to concentrate on what is there. In the case of the Middle East and North Africa the most obvious answer to this question is: the persistence of authoritarian regimes over long periods of time. And thus the focus shifted from studying the lack of democracy to studying what exactly made these authoritarian regimes so resilient.49

Scholars began to notice that the liberalization tendencies they had witnessed in Arab countries at the end of the 1980’s and the beginning of the 1990’s had not been part of a linear progression towards democracy, but part of a strategy to maintain authoritarian rule carefully crafted by Mubarak, Ben Ali, and

the likes. The so-called “hybrid-regimes” that were a result of this, were not a stage towards a more democratic society, they could very well be end-stages in itself, questioning Fukuyama’s premise that liberal-democracy was the end of history.  

Albrecht and Schlumberger describe what makes these authoritarian regimes so resilient, and points out the most important strategies these regimes use to maintain power. According to Albrecht and Schlumberger political regime durability is a function of repression and legitimacy. They state that levels of repression have been fairly stable over the years in Arab authoritarian states, and subsequently focus on strategies that are directed towards durability through legitimacy. They discern five strategies for regime maintenance, namely structures of legitimacy and strategies of legitimation; elite change; “imitative” institution building; co-optation; and strategic responses to external influences.  

Firstly, structures of legitimacy and legitimation is an overarching variable, which has an external and internal dimension. External legitimacy is about the extent to which the regime is considered legitimate by the international community, while internal legitimacy focuses on the extent to which the regime is considered legitimate by the people. Sources of internal legitimacy are allocative power, religious or traditional legitimacy, and developmental concepts based on collectivist ideologies, like Arab socialism.  

Secondly, elite change entails a change in the elite segment, through the entrance or exit of groups with a specific background or with a specific political priority. An example is the entering of businessmen and technocrats into Egypt’s elite under Sadat. This usually has the goal of widening the base of support of the authoritarian ruler or matching the structure of the elite to new priorities and circumstances. For example, the entry of businessmen into Egypt’s elite strata under Sadat, matched Sadat’s shift towards infitah, or economic liberalization of the Egyptian economy from Arab socialism and statism. Elite rotation and elite maintenance fall short of elite change, and instead are characterized by Schlumberger as elite dynamics. They refer to the ruler’s efforts to wield power uncontested through the creation of a pool of regime loyalists, who the leader can trust, and who are rotated across positions of political decision-making so they cannot attain a significant degree of personal power and subsequently challenge the ruler.  

Thirdly, imitative institution-building refers to the building of formal institutions to serve as an indicator of public opinion, create a semblance of contestation and competition, and to create an image abroad of a state that is not corrupt, bureaucratic, and authoritarian, while real power resides in informal power structures, such as Libya’s Jamahiriya structure versus Gaddafi’s Men of the Tent. This can have the function of undermining the opposition at home, and to create opportunities for securing aid and loans abroad, as these are usually tied to conditions that pertain to democratization and liberalization.

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Forthwith, co-optation refers to the social pacts between authoritarian states and their people, whereby wealth is distributed amongst the people, and financed by revenues from natural resources. It can also refer to the inclusion of social groups into the regimes’ elites in order to widen the power base of the regime. Schlumberger calls this inclusionary co-optation.\(^{54}\)

Lastly, Schlumberger mentions strategic responses to external influences as a strategy for regime maintenance. He argues that authoritarian regimes are aware of the heterogeneous priorities Western powers have in the MENA, namely Israel’s security; political stability ensuring a steady stream of oil from the Arab states to North America and Western Europe; to advocate the liberalization of economies in order to create new economic opportunities; and exportation of Western values, such as democracy, which are believed to have a positive effect on stability and interstate conflict, and use this knowledge to their advantage. The authoritarian regime responds to these priorities by, for example, altering their foreign policy to alleviate economic pressures, or by emphasizing economic and democratic reforms to gain donor aid, development aid, or military aid.\(^{55}\)

According to Gause, the current upheavals make a revision of theorizing on the MENA necessary. The regimes have proven less stable than the authoritarian resilience theories suggest. These theories help us in understanding why the regimes have been so stable for so long, but they have failed to see the uprisings coming. That is why it is important to understand the triggers of the current revolutions, and understand why authoritarianism did break down, albeit not always completely and not in a durable way. This in turn will help us reshape existing theorizing on the MENA.\(^{56}\)

Explanations on why scholars failed to see the uprising coming have been manifold. Gause states scholars have been focusing on the persistence of the authoritarian regime, and that is why they failed to see the uprisings coming. Goodwin highlights a finding from Kuran on the Eastern European revolutions which he believes is applicable to the Arab Spring as well: people in authoritarian regimes tend to not reveal their discontent on the regime in public, which makes the grievances people have seem less wide-spread than they actually are. This is called preference falsification. Aarts believes that the social world is too complex to make predictions about. It is not linear, and that is why making accurate predictions is almost impossible. However, we can reflect on how the revolutions came about.\(^{57}\)

There have been many scholars since the uprisings who have written about the causes of the Arab Spring. There have been even more different explanations on the causes of the revolutions: unemployment, inflation, kleptocracy, repression, lack of political participation, the rise of new media, foreign interference, and the list goes on forever. However, these terms can all be grouped in the categories political grievances,

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\(^{54}\) H. Albrecht and O. Schlumberger, ““Waiting for Godot”: Regime Change without Democratization in the Middle East”, *International Political Science Review*, 25 (4) 2004, p.380


\(^{57}\) F. Gregory Gause III, ‘Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring: The Myth of Authoritarian Stability’, *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2011; Goodwin, J., ‘Why We Were Surprised (Again) by the Arab Spring’, *Swiss Political Science Review*, 17 (4) 2011, p.453; Aarts, P., ‘From Resilience to Revolt: Making Sense of the Arab Spring’, Department of Political Science, University of Amsterdam, June 2012.
economic grievances, and external pressures, and a world-systemic opening. It is important to realize that it is not just one specific issue, or subset of issues that has lead to the uprisings: it is how these different sets of grievances interacted with each other that lead to mass uprisings. Below we will research the presence of political contradictions, economic contradictions, external pressures and a world systemic opening in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya, and how these contradictions, and international systemic factors interacted to lead to mass uprisings in these states.

In the section above I have given an overview of modern theorizing on revolutions. We have seen how theorizing on revolutions has evolved from merely descriptive accounts on the process of revolutions to refined analyses on its causes. We have also seen how the debate on the causes of revolutions has been split between voluntarists emphasizing the role of agency in causing revolutions, and structuralists emphasizing the relations between classes, classes and the state, and the state and other states, which was followed by efforts to create a synthetic approach which combines elements of the voluntarist and structuralist approach.

I use a structuralist approach, because in this research I want to analyze if we can draw general conclusions on the structural causes of the revolutions in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya. In my analysis I will employ a long range temporal focus, because I believe the political and economic contradictions characterizing the Egyptian, Tunisian and Libyan state before the revolutions have been in the making for decades already. Furthermore, I use the nomothetic method of comparison, as I try to make generalizations also applicable to other instances of revolutions. Lastly, in this thesis I focus on the macro-structural and domestic structural level at the cost of the micro-level, as the emphasis lies on the relations between classes, classes and the state, and between the state and other states.

In analyzing the causes of revolutions I will depart from Skocpol’s hypothesis that revolutions come about as a consequence of structural vulnerabilities on the state-level, accompanied by external pressures. These structural vulnerabilities can be traced back to the relation between the dominant class and producing class, and the relation between the dominant class and the state, which cause political and economic contradictions on the state-level. Foran has built on this premise by developing variables with what the extent of the presence of these political and economic contradictions can be estimated. He argues that personalist, authoritarian, repressive regimes are prone to political contradictions, and that dependent development causes economic contradictions on the state-level. I will use these variables to measure the extent of structural vulnerabilities on the state-level.

To analyze the extent to which a state is personalist in nature I use Geddes’ criteria to classify regimes, namely who decides who gets access to office and who controls policy? I use Baker’s criteria to measure the extent to which the state is authoritarian, namely : a highly centralized authority, and decision-making structures; presence of a control structure to stifle dissent and maintain order; top-down rule from the leader to the masses through use of a wide-spread bureaucracy; a large civil service sector to represent the state all the way down to the local levels of society; prevalence of nepotism over merit; wide-spread corruption; patron-client relationships between the leader and the elite; and a lack of horizontal political checks.
To analyze the presence of dependent development I use Foran’s description of this variable: dependent development applies to certain Third World economies that are experiencing a high level of economic development, as indicated by high GDP numbers, increases in foreign trade, and agricultural and industrial output, and at the same time are experiencing a high level of inflation, debt, and overburdened social infrastructure, like schools, and growing income inequality for example. I will use GDP, inflation and unemployment rates as indicators of the presence of dependent development.

Next to this, I will analyze the presence of external factors constraining the government’s room for maneuver, and widening this space for protestors, in the form of an economic downturn (as derived from Foran’s theory), and Goodwin’s world-systemic opening, by analyzing the state’s relations with other states and its position in the international system of states. Also, I will analyze the influence of historic and technological developments (as derived from Skocpol’s theory), like the rise social media on the revolutions in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya, and the influence of the Jasmine Revolution on the revolutions in Egypt, and Libya.

Schlumberger and Albrecht’s mechanisms for regime stability, namely strategies of legitimation, elite change, imitative institution building, cooptation, and strategic responses to external pressures, I use to explain throughout my case studies why the Mubarak, Ben Ali, and Gaddafi regimes have been so resilient in the past decades in order to get a better understanding of why this resilience broke down in the end, and in an effort to contribute to the debate on how theorizing on the Middle East should evolve post-Arab Spring.

Now we turn to the analysis section to analyze the presence of the above-mentioned variables, and to what extent they contributed to the coming about of a revolutionary situation in our case studies. Firstly, we will analyze to what extent the revolutionary situation in Egypt can be explained by structural vulnerabilities on the state-level. Then I will do the same for Tunisia, and Libya, followed by a comparative analysis on the similarities and differences between the case studies, in an effort to draw general conclusions on the explanatory value of structural vulnerabilities in explaining revolutions.

To analyze the presence of a personalist, authoritarian regime, we will use newspaper articles, journal articles, and books to paint a picture on the case studies’ state structure and subsequently analyze to what extent the regime was personalist and authoritarian using Geddes’ and Baker’s criteria. Also, we explain how this personalist, authoritarian regime leads to political contradictions and how this contributed to the breakdown of authoritarian resilience.

Using data on the case studies’ economy of the past decades, by consulting the databank of the World Bank, journal articles, books, and newspaper articles on the economic situation of these countries in modern history, we analyze the presence of dependent development. We will especially look at GDP, inflation, and unemployment rates over the past decades.

Lastly, we analyze the presence of external pressures in the form of an economic downturn, a world-systemic opening, and historic and technological developments contributing to the coming about of revolutions. We will consult data on the economic situation in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia on the eve of the revolutions in order to analyze to what extent the economic downturn influenced the coming about of a
revolutionary situation. We will use journal, and newspaper articles, statements made by the US and the EU and its member states in the media, and statements made and resolutions adopted by the United Nations Security Council on the revolutionary situations. Also, we analyze data on internet connectivity, and usage of social media in the case studies.

After the case studies, I make a comparative analysis between the structural vulnerabilities on the state-level in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya, and the external pressures and world-systemic openings that have lead to the revolutionary situations in these states. To compare the three cases, I use a Boolean truth table. By making this comparison, I can draw conclusions on the differences and commonalities between these three cases, and if there is a pattern of structural vulnerabilities, external pressures and world-systemic openings that has lead to the Arab Spring. Also, it allows me to draw, albeit carefully, conclusions on the emergence of revolutionary situations in general.
Egypt

On January 25th thousands of protesters took to the streets in Cairo to demand reforms from the Mubarak-regime. Assembled in Tahrir-square, or the Square of Freedom in the center of Cairo, they chanted: “bread, freedom, and dignity.” The protests lasted 18 days, with the military standing by silently as Mubarak announced his departure. After more than 30 years of rule, Egypt was ready to enter into its next phase. The events in Egypt took the world by surprise. There had been political upheavals before in Egypt, but never to this extent, and never before this successful. Up until 2011 the Mubarak regime had seemed stable. Plagued by an inherent lack of legitimacy, characteristic of all authoritarian regimes, the Mubarak regime has been very successful in maintaining regime stability by repression and employing strategies like elite change, cooptation, imitative institution building, several legitimation strategies, and strategic responses to external influences. However, as the external pressures on the regime mounted, employing said strategies became increasingly difficult for the regime. The subsequent breakdown of the repressive and administrative apparatus created fissures used by agents to instigate a revolution. Below I shall research to what extent Egypt was plagued by political contradictions on the state level as a consequence of the personalist authoritarian regime; the extent to which it suffered from economic contradictions brought on by dependent development; and how external factors, such as the Jasmine Revolution, the economic downturn, and a distracted United States made it impossible for the regime to maintain stability through its usual strategies. Lastly, I will analyze how agents made use of these fissures to take down the regime.58

Political contradictions

Theory tells us structural vulnerabilities on the state-level in the form of political and economic contradictions, and combined with external factors lead to a revolutionary situation. It also tells us that we can analyze the presence of said political contradictions by analyzing the extent to which a regime is personalist, repressive, and authoritarian in nature, as these types of regime are especially prone to create political contradictions on the state-level, and subsequently broad-based multi-class protest movements. In the following section I analyze to what extent the Mubarak regime was plagued by political contradictions on the state-level as a consequence of its personalist, authoritarian, repressive nature. This in turn I analyze by using Geddes’ criteria to classify regimes: who has access to office, and who decides on policy, and Baker’s criteria on what makes a regime authoritarian. To what extent was the Mubarak regime a personalist, authoritarian, repressive regime, and in what ways did the nature of the regime contribute to the coming about of a revolutionary situation?

Hosni Mubarak became president of Egypt in 1979, after President Anwar al-Sadat was assassinated by Muslim extremists factions in the military. His rule lasted for over 30 years, which is an impressive amount of time for a regime suffering from an inherent lack of legitimacy. As we shall see below, Mubarak managed to maintain a degree of legitimacy amongst the people by employing strategies like cooptation,

strategic responses to external pressures, elite change, imitative institution building, and several other strategies of legitimation. In times where these strategies were not sufficient to maintain stability, repression increased.

When Mubarak’s rule commenced he inherited a strong, pervasive, authoritarian state structure, laid down by his predecessor Sadat, and the first Free Officer to rule the Republic: Gamal Abdel Nasser. Nasser built strong institutions like Egypt’s huge sprawling bureaucracy and endowed the executive with broad powers. Sadat institutionalized these under the 1971 Constitution. Although Nasser rejected Western rule and influences in the newly independent Egypt, he did build institutions and a huge welfare state modeled after the concept of nation-states the Western powers had imposed upon the Arab World after World War I. Nasser was loved amongst the people for elevating the position of lower and middle class Egyptians, his anti-imperialist viewpoints and his charismatic personality. However, his policies did not lead to economic development, and ignored the threat social and demographic developments posed to Egyptian society.  

Under Sadat and Mubarak’s rule these problems worsened, as the economic scarcity increased, as we shall see below, and action was taken by the government to maintain stability and ensure the continuation of the regime, instead of implementing reforms which would lead to more political freedom and economic development. In the first place Mubarak implemented a series of legal and institutional measures to limit competition. Immediately after Mubarak was appointed President he reinstated the Emergency Law. In force since the 1952 revolution, and repealed mere months before Sadat’s death, the Emergency Law served to further advance the executive’s absolute control over society by giving the executive broad powers to restrain the movements of individuals, limit freedom of press, forbid meetings and gatherings of more than five persons, imprison suspects without trial, and the right to establish and trial people under exceptional courts like the Supreme State Security Court of Emergency.

Furthermore, freedom of association was curbed by the 1964 Association Law (replaced in 2003 by Law 83/2002) through which the government has the right to prevent the creation and order the dissolution of civil society groups. Whereas civil society groups focusing on issues such as health, and environmental concerns were able to operate fairly freely, groups focusing on human rights issues and political reform were subject to stringent government control. Freedom of speech was also heavily curtailed. Most media was state-owned, and there were stringent libel laws in place forbidding any publication that threatens the stability of the country, or the basic principles of the constitution. These laws lend themselves to very broad interpretation however, making any criticism of the regime punishable by steep fines or even prison sentences.

Mubarak also had firm control over the political landscape in Egypt. First of all, political opposition is hindered by the 1978 Political Parties Law, which states that every aspiring political party in Egypt must adhere to five doctrinal rules, while at the same time no party that resembles an existing political party is eligible for a license. This makes the creation of new political parties almost impossible. Existing parties were subject to severe harassment by the regime, and had difficulties finding a platform to spread their ideas due to the government’s heavy control of the media and civil society. Moreover, the election process itself was flawed. The presidential, parliamentary, and local elections were all characterized by a lack of independent supervision, ballot spoiling, vote buying, harassment by the security forces, and superficial meddling with voter turn-out. This consistently led to overwhelming election victories for Mubarak and the ruling NDP-party. The lack of competition made that people had no channels through which to voice their grievances vis-à-vis the government, which meant that signals from the people on political and economic grievances did not get back to the regime, and the last one was thus unable to deal adequately with them.  

To create a semblance of competition internally, and the semblance of democratization and liberalization to the outside world, Mubarak also engaged in the process of imitative institution building. Institutions that were meant to increase the people’s influence on politics in reality only served to further Mubarak’s power over society. For example, despite the fact that Egypt has institutions characteristic of democracies like a parliament, these institutions are void of actual power, filled with regime loyalists, and serve the government, instead of the people. The bureaucracy is another example of an institution void of real power, and filled with regime loyalists. Through the Minister of Interior Mubarak controlled Egypt’s sprawling bureaucracy, which swelled from 1.2 million employees under Nasser to 2.6 million in the 1990’s. Every level of governance consisted of a parallel structure of representative councils dominated by NDP-party members, and executives appointed by the government, making Mubarak able to exert power over every level of Egyptian society.

Mubarak did not only focus on strategically important fields of policy like foreign affairs. Next to the strong top-down rule by the executive, extending down to the local levels of Egyptian society, Mubarak had a firm grip on society horizontally speaking too, by extending his rule to almost all aspects of society. Although Egypt had a legislative, and judicial branch these were mainly side-lined by the executive, who

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together with a small circle of loyalists decided on government policy. Through his presidential bureaucracy, which is the administrative entourage directly surrounding the president, he appointed specialized national councils on issues such as prices, production, social affairs, science, and human rights bringing “the state and interest groups together under presidential patronage and expanding presidential influence into every branch of society”, leaving little room for the people to voice their grievances on the regime, which again made the regime unable to deal with the ever growing grievances of the population.64

The grievances were augmented as the legacy of Nasser was destroyed by Sadat and Mubarak. They no longer enjoyed the support of the lower and middle classes. In an effort to widen the base of support of the regime, both Sadat and Mubarak employed a strategy of elite change, or altering the composition of the elite in order to create support amongst segments in the population which had not been reached before. They were able to do that because they controlled who had access to government: they appointed people to the most influential governmental, civil, military, and diplomatic posts, filling them with people loyal to the regime. While under Nasser the circle of people who had influence on government policy consisted mostly of military men, under Sadat and Mubarak it started to include more academics, technocrats, and businessmen. This was partially a consequence of their policies of economic liberalization for which they needed a new base of support. These policies back-fired in the end, however, as the crony capitalism the policies induced lead to a small amount of super wealthy people, a wide base of lower class citizens not being able to enjoy the fruits of liberalization, and the destruction of the middle class.65

The rest of the population, including the military, the regime tried to co-opt in order to elude the mounting economic and political grievances these policies caused. Mubarak used an extensive system of carrots and sticks, or patronage and coercion. This system of patronage and its effects on regime stability have been aptly described by Perkins in her study of Mubarak’s “machinery.” She divides Egyptian society into three groups: the “Ins”, “Nearly-Ins”, and “Outs”, whereby the “Ins” constitute the elite-level of Egyptian society directly enjoying the spoils of mass government corruption; the “Nearly-Ins” the level below that, who’s loyalty is bought by the “Ins”; and the “Outs”: the bulk of Egyptian society that is either unwilling or unable to be a part of the regime and suffers from poverty and lack of opportunities. Due to the fact that the bureaucracy and the NDP could be found on every level of Egyptian society, and the strong hierarchy that marked these institutions, the distribution of incentives to remain loyal to the regime by Mubarak and his cronies was quite effective.66

Next to this, Mubarak was backed by the Egyptian military, who acted as a guarantor of the regime. According to the scholar A.S. Hashim, Sadat managed to remove the military from the centre of power by a process of civilianization and ‘depolitisisation’ of the army, continued by Mubarak. The military for its part,

accepted this because of growing professionalization, and because it retained the power to veto decisions on external security, like declaring war. But first and foremost, over the decades the Egyptian army had been given the freedom to build a huge Military Industrial Business Commercial Complex (MIBCC), he notes. Under the 1979 Law 32, the military was exempt from budgetary oversight and did not have to deal with the bureaucratic red tape ordinary Egyptians were subject to. Combined with the opportunities created by infitah, it became possible for the military to gain control over an estimated share of five to 40% of the Egyptian economy. This led to a tacit deal between the executive and the military, whereby they supported each other in guaranteeing the continuity of the regime, as long as they did not meddle in each other’s affairs.  

In times of heightened political tensions, the regimes strategies for retaining some degree of legitimacy were not effective enough anymore to retain stability. In these cases the regime fell back on her means of repression, restoring the calm with violence. The Bread Riots of 1977 are a good example of this, whereby the regime tasked a reluctant army to restore stability after the cutbacks of subsidies on food stuffs had lead to massive protests in the streets. Hashim describes how this is a good example of the delicate balance between the army and the executive, as Sadat actually thought the army top was coming to depose him as part of a military coup when a few top generals came into Sadat’s office to tell him the riots were over.

Repression has been a constant factor in the persistence of the authoritarian regime in Egypt though, as can be seen by the role the State Security Investigation Services (SSI) has played in keeping Mubarak in power. Since decades the SSI has worked with practically free reign on systematically breaking down opposition forces. They have been known to engage in the surveillance of opposition politicians and activists, torturing suspects, and monitoring communications activities, generally creating an atmosphere of intimidation and fear amongst the Egyptian people. In the 1990’s government repression increased under the pretext of combating Islamic extremism. The 1992 Anti-Terrorism Law was oftentimes used by the SSI to hinder political opponents of the regime. The police force used their powers in a similar vein, harassing those it perceived to be a threat to the regime, Mubarak and his family, or the force itself. Police brutality, corruption, criminality within the force, and impunity had become daily routine in Egypt, adding to the widespread grievances people had against the regime. However, as the legitimacy of the regime was waning due to worsening economic conditions, and demographic developments, the repression did increase in recent years.


In the section above, I have described Egypt’s state structure and the development thereof in modern history. I can now answer the questions posed in the introduction, using Geddes’ and Baker’s criteria on what constitutes as a personalist, authoritarian, repressive regime: to what extent Egypt under Mubarak was a personalist, authoritarian regime, and in what ways this contributed to the coming about of a revolutionary situation?

In conclusion, the Mubarak regime was authoritarian in nature. Recalling Baker’s criteria on authoritarianism, the regime had all the characteristics: a highly centralized authority, and decision-making structures; presence of a control structure to stifle dissent and maintain order; top-down rule from the leader to the masses through use of a wide-spread bureaucracy; a large civil service sector to represent the state all the way down to the local levels of society; prevalence of nepotism over merit; wide-spread corruption; patron-client relationships between the leader and the elite; and a lack of horizontal political checks. The regime was also personalist, in that Mubarak controlled Egypt’s decision-making structures, and who had access to these structures. However, Mubarak was not able to exert control without the support of the military, which remained behind the scenes, but was still a very influential actor. This makes Egypt a hybrid regime, although it has more characteristics of a personalist regime, than of a military one. This in turn lead to political contradictions on the state-level as Mubarak’s power was based on the support of an increasingly small portion of the population, businessmen and technocrats predominantly, who had a vested interest against reforms, which would elevate the position of the lower, and middle socioeconomic classes in Egyptian society, and alleviate their grievances.

Mubarak’s all-encompassing grip on Egyptian society, the fact that he decided on policy, and who had influence over policy making, also made that the Egyptian people identified Mubarak with the regime, as did the international community. As Goodwin argues this leads to a situation whereby people blame all their problems on the leader, since the regime controls every aspect of society. Because Mubarak did not grant any space to the opposition, or allow criticism of the regime, there was only one way people could make their grievances vis-à-vis the government heard: by protesting. Also, as noted above Mubarak’s policies to maintain regime stability had the effect of excluding more and more people and groups from political participation: as the influence of the business elite grew, the position of the military, the lower classes, and the middle class deteriorated, which made the regime vulnerable for broad based, cross-class uprisings from below.\footnote{J. Goodwin, ‘Old regimes and revolutions in the second and third world: A Comparative Perspective’, Social Science History, 18 (4) 1994, p.584}

**Economic contradictions**

the political and economic contradictions it has created. We will now research the extent to which Egypt’s economy was suffering from dependent development. We will research this by describing Egypt’s economic system, and how it has developed under Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak. Also, we will analyse GDP, inflation, and unemployment numbers, to see if we can speak of “growth within limits” in this case. Was there economic growth in Egypt in the years leading up to the revolution? Was this paired with high inflation, and unemployment rates? What were the effects of Egypt’s economic system on different classes in society? And how did the economic contradictions contribute to the emergence of a revolutionary situation in Egypt?

The origins of the Egyptian economic system, and the blatant corruption that is an integral part of it, can be traced back to Sadat’s presidency, and his infitah or Open Door policy. While Nasser was just as much an authoritarian dictator as Sadat and Mubarak, he managed to get the support of the people due to his charismatic personality, and his socialist policies which had the effect of creating more income equality in Egypt, and opening up the ranks of government, and the elite to an increasing number of lower, and lower-middle class citizens. Sadat, however, had to rely on cooptation, and corruption, which was fuelled by his Open Door policy.71

Although Nasser’s policies did create better economic and social conditions for the lower and middle classes in Egyptian society, the macro-economic effects of his large-scale nationalization projects, and import substitute export led growth, were less positive. In order to restore the Egyptian economy, Sadat decided to commence on a neoliberal path to growth. He opened up the Egyptian economy to foreign investments, and reversed many of Nasser’s economic policies, amongst which the re-privatisation of a lot of state-owned companies.72

Parallel to this, Sadat changed the composition of the elite and the access different classes had to it. While under Nasser the elite was mostly comprised of Free Officers, and military officers from the lower and middle classes, under Sadat this number decreased to twenty percent and the number of businessmen with access to the inner circle of the President started to increase. Sadat created a kind of Presidential Monarchy as Hinnebusch calls it, whereby the presidential entourage consisted mostly out of businessmen and technocrats who had married into his family and wherein: “Concentrated person-alized power persists, but is wielded in increasingly traditionalist fashion. The cautious liberalization and contraction of control from the apex should be seen basically as an attempt to satisfy (and win legitimacy from) elites, while containing pressures for a more significant opening up of the political system.”73

The effects of economic liberalization seemed to be positive at first as the GDP was growing from a mere 4% in 1975 to a staggering 13% in 1978. However, in the meanwhile Egypt’s trade deficit was rising

because the number of imports far exceeded the number of exports. Also, despite the liberalization Egypt’s economy was still heavily reliant on Suez Canal revenues, foreign workers’ remittances, and revenues from oil exports. Due to the economic crisis witnessed in the late seventies which influenced the oil market and the position of Egyptians on foreign labour markets, and led to a negative trade balance, Egypt’s foreign debt started to rise. Combined with the pressures of the social security system put in place by Nasser, amongst which the food subsidy system costing Egypt a staggering 13% of the total national income in 1980, Egypt’s economic development was still stagnant after more than half a decade of economic liberalization.74

In fact, Sadat’s infitah policy created a small number of winners, mostly the businessmen who were part of Egypt’s new elite, and a large number of “losers”, not benefiting from the new economic course. However, Sadat managed to remain in power despite his rising unpopularity with the lower and middle classes, because of the influx of foreign investments, and privatization, and the economic opportunities this created which allowed him to keep the ever-growing business elite, on which his power was based, satisfied.75

Also, Sadat mastered the art of responding strategically to external influences, turning constraints into opportunities. Sadat made clever use of the strategic priority Israel formed in U.S. foreign policy. He also used Western pressures to liberalize the economy to his own advantage. He started to offset debts by an influx of foreign aid, which he managed to increase by altering Egypt’s foreign policy drastically. In 1978 Egypt shocked the world by signing a separate, US brokered peace deal with Israel, which gained Egypt 1.3 billion dollars of US military aid per annum, an additional 800 million dollars of developmental aid per year, and Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai. Furthermore, he made several agreements with the IMF, which led to access to its structural funds and debt rescheduling, on the condition of structurally reforming the Egyptian economy. However, as the money poured in, and Egypt had some temporary room to breathe from the suffocating obligations caused by its huge foreign debt, real structural reforms were never implemented by Sadat. And thus, by seeking rapprochement to the West, and making an alliance with the US, Sadat managed to gather enough financial leeway to keep the elite satisfied, and sustain his power base, while the lion’s share of the population lived under deteriorating economic circumstances.76

Mubarak continued Sadat’s economic and foreign policies although at first he decided to take a more gradualist approach in an attempt to not anger the people who had at times shown fierce resistance to Sadat’s neoliberal policies and IMF stimulated reforms. For example, one of the IMF conditions Sadat did actually make an attempt to implement is the scale-back of Egypt’s costly food subsidy system. Of course, this

affected the lower and middle classes the most, and when subsidies were cut on bread in 1977 the so called Bread Riots that broke out in Egypt were so massive that the military had to step in to restore order. This led Sadat to overturn the decision to cut subsidies. Thus while Sadat continued his neoliberal policies, he also strove to keep the Egyptian welfare state intact. Not because he was concerned with the faith of the lower classes, but because he was afraid of political destabilization. Actual development of the economy, which could improve the situation of these classes, was lagging behind.\textsuperscript{77}

While Mubarak was in power the negative effects of neoliberal reforms and IMF stimulated economic restructuring persisted in the form of rising inflation, unemployment, and growing income inequality. While the GDP grew from 22 billion dollars in 1980, to 218 billion dollars in 2010 (calculated in current US dollars), unemployment numbers fluctuated around 10%, and inflation numbers were consistently high until the early 2000’s with peaks as high as 24%. After a short lull in rising inflation percentages, it started to rise again in 2002 to 11% in 2010. Especially after Mubarak accelerated economic liberalization in the early 1990’s after the 1991 IMF agreement, economic hardship for the lower and middle classes who had to cope with real income losses from cuts in food subsidies but also privatization of state owned companies - a large source of labour for the Egyptian people, increased.\textsuperscript{78}

These economic developments also had an impact on the political situation in Egypt. As Goldstone argues a regime’s legitimacy starts to wane when the people see it as both inefficient and unjust. While Nasser might have been an authoritarian dictator, he did decrease the income gap in Egypt and employed a number of development strategies as to elevate the position of the lower classes in Egypt. The Egyptian people accepted his absolute power because he carried out the tasks of increasing economic development, and taking care of the lower classes. Sadat and Mubarak, however, carried out neither of these tasks. Au contraire, the advantages the lower and middle classes gained under Nasser were destroyed by their neoliberal policies. In addition, their regimes were also seen as unjust, as corruption flourished and the gap between the rich and the poor increased under their reigns. Also, as food subsidies and job opportunities with state owned companies had been means for the regime to co-opt the people, and keep them complacent despite the lack of political freedom, an important pillar of regime stability was crumbling as a consequence of the neoliberal course.\textsuperscript{79}


Demographic pressures like the exorbitant population growth and the youth bulge compounded the economic and social problems. As the population in Egypt grew by 90% from 45 million to 85 million people in the thirty years that Mubarak ruled the country, the costs of the food subsidy system, and other social security measures grew with it. Also, health care and educational infrastructures were overloaded, and decreasing in quality. Furthermore, half of Egypt’s population is between the ages of 15 and 24. Every year 700,000 of these young Egyptians graduates from university, while the government only has the capacity to create 200,000 new jobs. It is precisely this group that was predominantly present on Tahrir Square. As Jack Goldstone argues this is because “the rapid growth of youth can undermine existing political coalitions, creating instability. Large youth cohorts are often drawn to new ideas and heterodox religions, challenging older forms of authority. In addition, because most young people have fewer responsibilities for families and careers, they are relatively easily mobilized for social or political conflicts.”

The youthful Egyptians were not the only segment in society amongst which Mubarak managed to create grievances. Urban workers’ position in society increasingly deteriorated during Mubarak’s years in power as the number of people living below the poverty line in urban centres increased, albeit less than in the rural areas. Again, this can be led back to government reform programs, as well as corruption, and patronage. The Egyptian Trade Unions Federation, or ETUF, instead of representing the labour unions and its affiliated workers, represented the government and its co-opted business elite’s interest. The minimum wage had not been raised since 1984 for example.

The rural population also suffered from reforms implemented by the regime benefitting the landed elite, who exerted control in the country side on behalf of the government. Nasser’s power base was consolidated on support of the military, and the lower and middle class, amongst which the peasants. In 1952 he implemented wide-scale agricultural reforms, which strengthened the position of tenants vis-à-vis landowners, by imposing landownership ceilings, making rental contracts hereditary, and establishing agricultural co-operations. As Sadat and Mubarak relied mostly on the business and landed elite to stay in power, talk of reversal of these policies started as early as the mid-seventies. In the end the land reforms were fully implemented by the Mubarak regime in 1997. Contracts could no longer be inherited, landowners had the right to sell or take back their land whenever they pleased, and there was no limit to the maximum rent the landowner was allowed to ask of the tenant. Furthermore, the co-operations were dissolved. This led to

an enormous loss of income for the rural population, and consequently opportunities for education and social transition.\textsuperscript{82}

However, Mubarak’s ultimate mistake was that he managed to not just alienate the lower and middle classes, but also part of the elite. According to most scholars on revolutions, immediately before upheavals break out a fragmentation of the elite can be witnessed. The military, still an essential part of the regime as explained above looked with weary eyes at the way Mubarak was seemingly grooming his son Gamal Mubarak to take over power. He gave him a position in the NDP, and his Tomorrow Party and the neoliberal reforms they proposed had a lot of influence in Mubarak’s inner circle. Gamal Mubarak had no connections to the army. Instead, he was drawn to the business elite in Egypt, who profited from his proximity to the regime. As a consequence, the military began to perceive Gamal and his entourage both as a political competitor (as Egypt’s leader had been provided by the army since 1952), and an economic competitor.\textsuperscript{83}

In the section above I have described the development of Egypt’s economic structure under Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak. Now I can draw a conclusion on to what extent dependent development was present in Egypt, and how this has contributed to the coming about of a revolutionary situation. In conclusion, although there was economic growth, this was not invested in the Egyptian society, leading to a lack of development. Economic reforms were needed, as demographic challenges put pressure on the existing economic structure. This is reflected in the increase in unemployment, and inflation, and overburdening of the public sector, education system, and health care institutions. Economic reforms benefitted the regime, and the business elite, who had a monopoly on the economic opportunities neo-liberalism created. The foreign investments neo-liberal reforms stimulated, created a comprador bourgeoisie, or an alliance between Western business elites, and the Egyptian business elite. The last group was oriented towards the West, and increasingly isolated itself from the Egyptian middle, and lower classes. The state structures put in place after the First World War facilitated this, as they were created to meet the needs of the West, and not the Egyptian society. Center-periphery relations were thus reproduced in Egyptian society, excluding a growing number of people from being able to participate in the official economic structures, and creating economic grievances amongst more and more groups in society. These grievances were not addressed by the Mubarak regime by implementing reforms improving the economic situation of the lower and middle classes, as this would have gone against the interest of the business elite.

External factors
Theory tells us that a revolutionary situation comes about when a state plagued by structural vulnerabilities on the state-level, in the form of political and economic contradictions is faced with a crisis, economic or military for example, or modernization pressures it cannot handle because of the debilitating effects of the economic and political contradictions on the state-level on the government. Also, a world-systemic opening


has to be present which constrains the room for maneuver of the government and widens it for the opposition. This makes the state vulnerable for uprisings from below. In the following section I analyze the extent to which Egypt was faced with external pressures, like an economic downturn, the Jasmine revolution, and the rise of social media, and a world-systemic opening, and in what ways these contributed to the emergence of the Nile revolution.

The US

Theory tells us that a world-systemic opening serves to widen the room for maneuver of protestors and to constrain the room for maneuver of the government. This in turn makes it possible for the opposition to carry through a revolution. It is also described by Goodwin as the “let-up of external controls” by the dominant outside power. The United States, the only superpower since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989, can be regarded as the dominant outside power in Egypt. It has a large stake in continued stability in North Africa, and the Middle East, stable energy prices, fighting Islamist extremism and consequently the War on Terror, and lastly preventing any political change in the region to have the potential to have far-reaching consequences for its closest ally in the region: Israel. Needless to say, these interests have led the US to follow the political upheaval in Egypt very closely. In what ways did the position of the US effect the emergence of the revolutionary situation in Egypt?84

Because of the strategic significance of its alliance with Egypt, the US has been willing to look the other way since 1979 when it comes to Egypt’s human rights situation and lack of political freedom. With the exception of the condemning of the incarceration of Egyptian intellectual and activist Saad Eddad Ibrahim by President Bush in 2002 and the subsequent withholding of additional foreign assistance to Egypt next to the 2 billion dollars per annum it already received, the US government has remained fairly silent on these sensitive topics. Even though human rights, and democracy promotion are two of the main pillars of American foreign policy, there was no telling what would happen if Egypt did hold free and fair elections, except that chances were big that Mubarak would not win them. A better partner than him the US could not have hoped for, as Mubarak was willing to dance to the US its tune when it came to combating Islamist extremism, and guaranteeing Israel’s security by amongst other things enforcing the blockade of the Gaza Strip, in exchange for 2 billion dollars per year which Mubarak could use in turn to buy the loyalty of the army and his cronies.85

It should come as no surprise then that the US kept on supporting the regime throughout two weeks of protests, arguing that the regime was making an effort to meet the people’s legitimate demands and calling

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for an orderly transition, meaning that Mubarak would stay in power while free and fair elections were organized for September 2011, and the constitution amended. However, as the protestors in Tahrir Square would accept nothing less than Mubarak’s departure, the US had no choice but to accept unconstitutional regime change, and Mubarak’s ouster.\(^6\)

It had little choice as further involvement in the situation, and a continuation of support for the Mubarak regime could leave the US on the wrong side of history after the smoke of the upheaval had cleared up, and deprive it of all its sway over Egyptian politics. Besides this, even if the US government had wanted to extend its involvement, the question remains if it could have. With American troops still fighting in Afghanistan, and Iraq, and the 2008 economic downturn severely hitting the US too, it had little room to provide resources or more in support of the Mubarak regime. The distraction of the US, and its inability to aid Mubarak to stay in power, weakened the regime’s position vis-à-vis the people demonstrating in Tahrir Square.

**Economic downturn**

Furthermore, as already touched upon in the section above, the world witnessed a severe economic downturn in 2008. As leading theorists on revolutions such as Foran note: in almost all cases of revolutionary upheaval a sharp economic downturn can be witnessed just before the situation escalates. This is because the revenues governments can raise during such times decline, and lead to an inability to meet financial obligations. In the case of Egypt GDP growth rates sunk from 7% in 2008 to 5% in 2009, inflation and unemployment rates both rose to 30%, and Foreign Direct Investment dropped to 40%. The strains this put on the state’s budget constrained Mubarak’s room for maneuver when the protests commenced.\(^7\)

Another factor of importance related to the 2008 economic crisis is that people’s grievances grow when their expectations for a better future rise, only to have their hopes dashed. Korotayev and Zinkina highlight a brilliant finding put forth by Egyptian economists Gamal Siam and Hanada Mostafa Abdel Radi in one of their recent research papers. At the beginning of the economic crisis several price “bubbles” blew, which had the effect of a sharp drop in prices for several commodities, amongst which foodstuffs such as wheat and cooking oil. As a consequence, during the initial stages of the economic crisis the number of Egyptians living beneath the poverty line of two dollars a day actually decreased. However, after these bubbles burst prices started to rise again quickly and were roughly at the same level as before the drop at the beginning of 2011, when the protests in Egypt commenced.\(^8\)

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\(^{8}\)A.V. Korotayev, 'A demographic structural analysis', *Entelequia revista interdisciplinair*, (3) 2011, p.153-156
Social media

According to theory historic, and technological developments can have an effect on revolutions in a later stage in time. The rise of social media in the Arab World affected the outcome of the demonstrations in several ways. First of all, social media allowed different opposition groups in Egypt to create a public space where they could share their grievances against the regime, and mobilize people to take action. The protests that commenced on January 25th, 2011 were actually initiated by an opposition group that made use of Facebook to galvanize people to go out on the street to demonstrate against the regime. In this case, the knife does cut both ways though: while some people argue that social media provides people living in authoritarian regimes a safe space to share grievances, and discuss strategy, there are also those that argue that social media actually makes it easier for the mukhabarat to track down dissenters. In Egypt there is a popular joke whereby Mubarak thanks head of State Security Intelligence Services Suleiman for his greatest invention yet: Facebook.  

Next to this, social media and the wide-spread availability of smart phones also influenced the way Egyptians and the international community perceived the regime. As such, it constrained the regime’s ability to use violence against the protestors. Even before the revolution more and more amateur footage of police brutality, and corruption started to find its way to YouTube. This led to an increasing number of Egyptians becoming aware of the fact that everyone could become a victim of police brutality. As the initiator of the Facebook page “We are all Khaled Said” put it after the death of Khaled Said, who posted a video about corruption in the police force on YouTube, and was subsequently bludgeoned to death: “Today they killed Khaled. If I don’t act for his sake, tomorrow they will kill me.” Furthermore, Mubarak did not want to alienate the international community through leakage of footage whereby peaceful protestors were attacked, as his total shut down of the internet at the end of January 2011 demonstrates. Footage that did come out showing repression of the regime against the peaceful protests, had the effect of swaying public opinion towards the people of Egypt. In conclusion, the rise of social media effected the relationship between the state, the people, and the international community in favor of the demonstrators.

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Jasmine revolution

Lastly, and related to the rise of social media is the revolution in Tunisia. As we shall see in the following chapter the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazzizi led to a wave of protests that swept across the country, and ultimately led to the fall of President Ben Ali. The fact that a fellow Arabic people could succeed in displacing a decennia old stale regime, which managed to remain in power by widespread corruption and repression, inspired the Egyptian people to do the same. The Tunisian revolution was the topic of the day for Egyptian Facebook and Twitter-users. Egyptian activists exchanged ideas and advise with Tunisian activists on how to protest against the regime while avoiding government repression, and were furthermore inspired by their actions and successes.91

In conclusion, the external pressures combined with the world-systemic opening to create a revolutionary crisis, as the developments mentioned above weakened the Mubarak regime, and strengthened the opposition. The opposition was able to instigate mass uprisings, facilitated by the use of social media, inspired by the Jasmine Revolution, and fueled by the economic grievances pushed past breaking point during the economic crisis. Mubarak was hampered in his efforts to quell the protests, as he was operating in an international environment that was at the least neutral, and at the most on the side of the protestors. It is the conjuncture of the political, and economic contradictions, combined with external pressures and a world-systemic opening, that made the regime vulnerable for revolts from below. As we shall see below, in the case of Egypt, this lead to mass uprisings, which in the end lead to Mubarak’s downfall.

Conjuncture and mass uprisings

The Mubarak regime had been stable for over thirty years. The regime was personalist, and authoritarian in nature, as Mubarak controlled Egypt’s decision-making structures, and who had access to these. Still on January 25th, 2011 mass uprisings commenced which the regime could not overcome, despite Mubarak’s firm control over Egyptian society. What changed from before? Pressures brought on by changes in the world economy, and from Western aid donors and lenders drove Egypt towards neoliberalisation. This was supposed to create new bases of support, and the economic growth necessary to tackle the demographic challenges Middle Eastern countries were facing, and be a step towards political liberalization, according to neoliberal thinkers. However, Gause states, these strategies back-fired: they exacerbated inequalities, and created a wealthy class of businessmen including family members of the ruling elite.92

It also made it harder for the regime to keep the mechanisms Schlumberger describes in his theory on regime stability in place. First of all, internally the regime’s allocative power was hampered by the fact that

the very mechanisms it deployed to co-opt the people fell victim first to the regime's neoliberal course, namely state subsidies and jobs. The regime could no longer placate the economic woes of the people with these things, in fact breaking the tacit social contract which has been in place in Egypt ever since the Free Officers took power, and costing the regime legitimacy amongst the people.

Secondly, the fact that Mubarak and his family shared in the spoils of the fruits of neoliberalisation also decreased its legitimacy. Where Nasser's legitimacy flowed from his charismatic personality, anti-imperialism, and concern for the lower and middle classes, and Sadat's from his religious, humble and patrimonial stature, Mubarak was seen as corrupt, and unjust. Also, adding to this is the fact that Mubarak was the butt of the joke amongst the people of the MENA, who jokingly called him ‘la vache qui rit’ (after a popular French cheese named ‘the laughing cow’ in English).93

The accompanying change in the elite structure did not serve to empower the regime’s support base, it weakened it by alienating the lower and middle class, and allowing a super wealthy business class to become a threat to the regime’s ultimate guarantor of continuity: the army. The process of imitative institution building lead to an incongruity between Egypt’s formal decision making structures and its true (informal) decision making structures, whereby (aspiring) members of the business class overcrowded these faux institutions in an effort to climb the social ladder. In this respect, Egypt’s parliament and other formal decision making institutions did not even serve their original functions anymore of indicating public opinion, and to create a semblance of competition, as the businessmen were not concerned with representing or even pulsing public opinion, and the Egyptian people were well aware of this fact. Similarly, the executive’s firm control over civil society made ngo’s in Egypt a means for interest manipulation and rent-seeking, instead of allowing it to serve its function of aggregating signals in society on grievances, and initiating change. 94

The developments described above fundamentally altered the relation between the state and the dominant class, and the dominant class and the producing class. The proximity of the business class to the regime created economic contradictions that hampered the Egyptian government in implementing reforms stimulating actual economic growth. The neoliberal economic reforms, which were supposed to modernize the Egyptian economy, and make it internationally more competitive, lead to dependent development. The fruits of economic growth benefitted a small number of people close to the regime, and duped the lion’s share of Egypt’s people into economic misery, through high unemployment numbers and rising inflation percentages.95

The rise in labor strikes and political protests in the last decade reflected the growing grievances the Egyptian people had vis-à-vis the regime. The number of strikes in Egypt had been rising exponentially in Egypt in the last decade, skyrocketing after the global economic downturn to 630 strikes in 2008. The number of protest movements (political and economic) was growing as well, with the most familiar ones being the Kefaya (‘Enough’) Movement which asserted itself in 2004 with an agenda aimed at political

93 A. Khalil, ‘The Irony of Tahrir Square’, Foreign Affairs, July 2013
reforms, and banning Mubarak from another term in office. Furthermore, the National Coalition for Democratic Change, which included politicians, intellectuals, and political and economic analysts, founded by former Egyptian ministers, called for a new constitution before the elections of 2005. The United National Front for Change united independent candidates from different Egyptian opposition parties, the Muslim Brotherhood, the National Community for Democratic Change, and Egyptian Movement for Change in their efforts to pressure the regime into implementing political reforms. Lastly, the April 6th Movement arose in 2009 from a call to action on Facebook by young people, to support a nationwide strike of textile workers. However, the protests did not gain momentum as the protests groups calling for political change, and the protest groups calling for economic change did not fuse their demands, which made for the fact that the protests were not widespread and long in duration, and thus easily suppressed by the regime.  

The situation came to a boiling point when the regime was faced with external pressures, which it could not deal with because of the political, and economic contradictions it had created itself. The economic crisis enhanced the economic grievances to an unbearable situation for the gross of the Egyptian people, putting people in a situation where there was nothing left to lose. The Jasmine Revolution had the effect of stimulating people to go out on the street again. Social media facilitated the initiators in their efforts.

Agency took center stage when the April 6th Movement made a call to action on Facebook on National Police Day. They also distributed booklets on the streets and engaged in face-to-face conversations with citizens on the need to go out on the street. As one of the founders would say later on the Jasmine Revolution gave a different feel to National Police Day. It seemed contradictory to the founders to celebrate an institution causing so much hardship amongst the people. They had already built up a lot of followers over the past years and their call to action, supported by the We Are All Khaled Said Movement motivated more than 50,000 people to protest the regime on National Police Day. They demanded basic human rights for the Egyptian people. Soon they were joined by the Youth for Justice and Freedom organization, the Democratic Front, the Ghad Party, the National Association for Change, the ElBaradei Campaign, Christian Copts, members of the Muslim Brotherhood who participated individually in the protests, and many others. Workers joined, protesting on an individual basis at first, but in a more organized capacity as the revolution unfolded. Representatives of independent unions of health care technicians and teachers took the lead in establishing EFITU, the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions, which called for a general strike on 8 February 2011.

For the first time, political and economic protest movements, and labour strikes merged in Egypt to form a broad coalition of opposition to the regime. Another factor that made the protests widespread this time, is that it was a leaderless protest movement, manifesting itself on Tahrir Square and soon in the streets

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and on the squares of other Egyptian cities, which made for the fact that there were no factional tensions between people affiliated with different groups, and that no group felt excluded from the uprising.\textsuperscript{98}

As Schlumberger says regime persistence is a function of legitimacy and repression. The regime’s legitimacy was at an all time low, so Mubarak deployed the police to deal with the uprising. The group of protestors was too big for the police force to suppress, however. The Central Security Forces (CSF) were then called in to reestablish order in the streets on 28 January 2011. Consisting of men who lack the vocational and educational skills to become an army conscript, the CSF had been neglected by the government for decades, even resulting in protests by the CSF against the regime in 1986. They did not have the training, means or will to clear the streets.\textsuperscript{99}

Many times it has been said that the army’s reaction to the uprising would be of crucial significance to the course of these events. This is correct. When the government was unable to deal with the grievances of the protestors through reforms, and the police, and the CSF proved unable to deal with the protests, it looked to the army to restore order and calm in the streets. However, the army did not want to intervene on behalf of the government for a number of reasons. In the first place, as stated above the army and the government supported each other in maintaining regime stability. The army was not so sure though that the protests against Mubarak would subside, and that the President would be able to deal with the grievances of the protestors after the unrest had cleared. From that perspective, the army was wise not to tie its faith to the Mubarak regime in the hopes that the army itself and their five to 40% stake in the Egyptian economy would remain unaffected throughout the process.\textsuperscript{100}

Secondly, the army had their grievances against the regime as well, which prevented it from stepping in. As stated above, the army top regarded Gamal Mubarak both as a political and economic competitor. The process of elite change started by Sadat and continued by Mubarak, accompanying the neoliberal economic policies is a direct cause of this. In other words, the relation between the state and an important part of the dominant elite had changed, tying the regime’s hands in times of crises.

Another reason the army refused to step in has to do with the lower level military men, instead of the top army brass according to Hashim. The last group was guaranteed a generous retirement after they had served, owing to their large business interests. However, the levels below the high ranking officers did not share in the dividends these business interests yielded the army, and these soldiers were lucky to get a position as a servant for one of the higher ranking officers for example after retirement. This made for the fact that their loyalties lay closer to the disaffected youth and other downtrodden citizens instead of to the

state. As a consequence a lot of lower level officers and soldiers sympathized with the protestors instead of with the regime.\textsuperscript{101}

The result was that the army concluded Mubarak’s position was untenable. Back in Egypt, the SCAF informed Mubarak of their demand that he step down. Completely alienated, he departed on 11 February 2011, after 18 days of protests. The people of Egypt were exhilarated by his departure. However, real political and social reforms have unfortunately not come about yet, as the army retained its powerful position behind the scenes, and even took center stage again when it committed a military coup in July 2013, deposing the democratically elected President Mohammed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood, and installing one of the Free Officers General Al-Sisi as president. And as a former Egyptian diplomat puts it: the Egyptian people will never know true democracy until the army is willing to enter society as an equal partner. At this point in time though, there is no prospect of such a revolutionary development.\textsuperscript{102}

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Tunisia

Tunisia was the first country that fell victim to revolutionary uprisings in North Africa, and the Middle East. When Mohammed Bouazizi, a local street vendor with a university education, went to the governor’s office to challenge his vending cart being acquisitioned by police forces and his complaints were not being heard, and moreover was humiliated by a female police officer who slapped him across the face, he set himself on fire out of protest to the kleptocratic regime of Ben Ali. Not long after, Bouazizi died in the hospital, but his act sparked a wave of protest throughout Tunisia, and eventually the whole Arab World. On January 14, 2011 a large number of Ben Ali’s family members were arrested, while Ben Ali himself managed to escape the country and fly to Saudi Arabia. As in the case of Egypt, the regime had been stable for decades. To analyze the structural vulnerabilities that lead to the revolution, it is important to look at the mechanisms of regime stability that kept the regime in place for so long, and the reason behind the breakdown of these mechanisms. In this context I look at the regime’s means of repression and its employment of strategies like elite change, cooptation, imitative institution building, several legitimation strategies, and strategic responses to external influences. I analyze the political contradictions of the political system in Tunisia under Ben Ali, and examine the structural economic contradictions leading to the revolutionary situation. Lastly, I look at the presence of a world systemic opening and external pressures on the regime which gave the opposition a chance to tear it down.103

Political contradictions

According to theory personalist, authoritarian, repressive regimes are prone to create political contradictions on the state-level. In this first section I analyze to what extent the Ben Ali regime was a personalist, authoritarian regime. I describe the development of the political system from the end of the colonial period until the revolutionary upheaval in 2010. I use Baker’s criteria to analyze to what extent the regime was authoritarian, and Geddes’ criteria to see if the regime was personalist in nature. I also describe the political contradictions this brought about on the state-level, and how these contributed to the revolutionary situation in Tunisia.

After Tunisia freed itself from French colonization, it declared itself a republic in 1957, and Bourguiba, leader of the opposition party the neo-Destours, became the first president. Bouguiba quickly moved to bring all aspects of society under the influence of the state, by reforming the educational, and judicial systems of Tunisia. His rule had some positive aspects, like women acquiring equality under law, and free and standard education for all. However, behind this façade of secularism and promoting emancipation for women, and several other groups in society, lay a ruthless dictatorship. Bourguiba made sure there was no

chance of an opposition coming to fruition that could challenge his rule, and met criticism of his regime and its policies with harsh repression.\textsuperscript{104}

In 1987 General Zine Abidine Ben Ali staged a successful coup, taking over power from Bourguiba because of health reasons. At first, this change of power seemed to herald in a new era for Tunisia, as Ben Ali promised democratic reform to the people, and took a number of measures seemingly indicating he would make good on his promise. Opposition members in exile were welcomed back to the country, political prisoners were released, Ben Ali promised to change the constitution in order to limit the extensive powers of the executive, planned multi-party elections for the year 1989, and relaxed restrictions on the freedom of press.\textsuperscript{105}

This upsurge of democratic sentiment was short-lived, however. When the opposition won almost twenty percent of the votes, Ben Ali felt threatened by its popularity, and tightened his grip on the political landscape. He reversed his relaxation towards Islamic opposition, and soon all other opposition parties followed suit. Opposition parties were harassed, under constant surveillance, and sometimes their leaders were even imprisoned. The electoral process favored Ben Ali’s RCD party, who had significantly more means, and opportunities for campaigning. Opposition parties’ campaigns were often hindered, for example by restricting their access to media, forbidding their newspapers, and making the acquisition of funds difficult. The regime was furthermore suspected of vote buying, and electoral fraud- suspicions that were made more credible by the fact that it refused to let international watchdogs monitor the electoral process.\textsuperscript{106}

In 1999 the Ben Ali regime seemingly loosened its grip on politics by allowing multi-candidate presidential elections. However, the eligibility criteria for presidential candidates were so stringent that almost no one even ran opposite Ben Ali. For example, a presidential candidate had to have been leader of his political party for a minimum of two years. This allowed Ben Ali to weed out serious candidates in a fairly early stage. Opposition members that did manage to run were harassed, and their campaigns systematically obstructed, leading to a consistent victory for Ben Ali. These processes allowed Ben Ali to create a facade of democratization to the Western world, diffusing criticism on his authoritarian policies, while in fact political freedom had not increased for the Tunisian people.\textsuperscript{107}

Furthermore, the president used the ruling party, the RCD, to exert his influence over Tunisian society. As Béatrice Hibou describes it: “A meticulous nationwide grid or network of cells was one of the party’s central modalities. After the police, the various bodies of the RCD unquestionably constituted the greatest, most systematic, national network. The physical omnipresence of the party was illustrated through the thousands of cells distributed throughout the country (seventy- five hundred local cells and twenty- two hundred professional cells), and in the construction of its new headquarters that, symbolically placed at the

\textsuperscript{104} N. Tanriverdi, ‘Background of the Tunisian Revolution’, \textit{Alternative Politics}, November 3 (3) 2011, p.555-557
\textsuperscript{105} N. Tanriverdi, ‘Background of the Tunisian Revolution’, \textit{Alternative Politics}, November 3 (3) 2011, p.557-558
entrance of the business district, is meant to display a flamboyant modernity. The cells were above all—they oversaw every aspect of life, as well as work, and functioned as a warning to respect the norm, the established order.”

More than two million people held an RCD membership card, and through its summer schools, political roundtables, and academies, the leaders of the party spread the ideas of the inner circle of the ruling elite throughout the population. Furthermore, membership of the RCD was necessary to acquire government services such as the issuance of a passport, to get electricity, to be connected to the sewerage, or to acquire any kind of licence whatsoever. According to Ayeb this explains the RCD’s high membership rate.

Next to this, the president made sure too there was no civil society capable of criticizing the regime. Critics of Ben Ali ended up in jail, or worse. Most importantly, the government co-opted all, but four non-governmental organizations, so as to quell their criticism. A staggering 8,000 non-governmental organisations, or “organisations vraiment gouvernementales” (translated from French as: in truth government organisations) as people in Tunisia like to call them, operated under the control of the RCD. These “imitative institutions” had the function of seeking rents of Western governments, manipulating interests, and in general to undermine the development of a true vibrant civil society in Tunisia. Those that did remain independent of the government were hindered in their work, by various legal constraints. Also, there were severe restrictions on the freedom of press, and internet access, which made public criticism of the regime, and the expression of grievances next to impossible.

Furthermore, the president consolidated and maintained his power through his repressive apparatus, which consisted of the police force, the Judicial Forces, the Presidential Guard, and the Intervention Forces. Unlike several similar North African, and Middle Eastern regimes the military in Tunisia has always been a fairly autonomous entity, largely operating outside the structures of the Ben Ali regime. One might even say that the military in Tunisia was marginalized, explaining why the army was quick to jump to the defence of the protesters in the Winter of 2010-2011. Under the Ben Ali regime the military had no political power, in fact military conscripts could not even vote; the percentage of GDP allocated to military spending was a mere 1.4% per year; and the Tunisian army had to make do with donated, obsolete weapons, as the government spent next to nothing on arms purchases.

Instead, Ben Ali relied on his internal security apparatus to quell protests and quiet dissidents. This can in part be explained by the fact that Ben Ali’s rise to power was not through a military coup as in Egypt, but through a “police coup” as Lutterbeck puts it. Ben Ali rose to power through Tunisia’s internal security

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apparatus, first occupying the post of Director-General of National Security, and then the position of Minister of Interior, granting him control over the police and internal security forces. It was here that Ben Ali augmented and consolidated his power, ultimately enabling him to topple Bourguiba. During Ben Ali’s reign the police and internal security forces operated completely at his discretion. As one police officer stated: “our activities were determined mainly by direct orders of Ben Ali or members of important families; enforcing the law was not very relevant for us.” Especially the police, whose numbers fluctuate between a staggering 130,000 and 200,000 officers (on a relatively small population of 10.7 million people), engaged in practices such as harassment of political opponents, arbitrary arrests, torture, and other human rights violations, to protect the regime.112

Lastly, the president had constructed a vast network of patron-client relationships permeating all areas of Tunisian society, especially the economy. If one needed anything, ranging from business licenses, to electricity, to finding a job, one needed connections to the ruling family or had to pay bribes. So vast was the corruption of the Ben Ali-Trabelsi clan that they were dubbed “The Family” (as if Tunisia were ruled by the mafia). The Ben Ali’s and Trabelsi’s managed to alienate everyone except those closest to them from the regime because of this corruption. Even ministers complained about being frozen out by the Ben Ali-Trabelsi clan, as Ben Ali’s inner circle was dominated by direct, and extended family members, and they controlled who had access to the President.113

In the section above I analyzed to what extent Ben Ali’s regime was a personalist, authoritarian regime, and in what ways this contributed to the emergence of a revolutionary situation. In conclusion, the Ben Ali regime was a highly authoritarian regime. It had strong centralized authority, and decision-making structures; the police stifled dissent, and maintained order through repression; top-down rule from the leader to the masses took place via the RCD, and even represented the regime at the local level; nepotism was more important than merit; corruption was wide-spread; patron-client relationships between Ben Ali, and the dominant elite were in place; and there was a lack of horizontal political checks. Also, the regime was personalist, as Ben Ali controlled the decision-making structures, and who had access to office.

Just like in the case of Egypt, this caused political contradictions on the state-level. The regime’s control over society was so great, and extensive that people had no channels through which to voice their grievances. Feedback on the regime’s policies thus got never back to the inner circle of Ben Ali, and in those cases it did, it was repressed immediately. This means that the grievances of the people were not addressed and kept on growing, and protesting was the only means in Tunisia for the citizens to make their voices heard. Furthermore, through the years the regime excluded more and more people from political participation, as the Ben Ali’s and Trabelsi’s monopolized all power, which made the regime vulnerable for broad-based cross-class uprisings from below.

Economic contradictions

Theory tells us dependent development is prone to lead to economic contradictions on the state-level. These combine with the political contradictions discussed above to create structural vulnerabilities on the state-level, which makes the state vulnerable for broad-based cross class uprisings from below in case of a crisis of the state. In the section below I analyze the presence of dependent development in Tunisia. Firstly, I describe the development of the economic system in Tunisia since the end of the French protectorate. Then I analyze if dependent development is present, by looking at Tunisia’s GDP, inflation, and unemployment rates, and analyzing the effects of Tunisia’s economic system on different classes in society. Lastly, I take a look at the economic contradictions this brought about on the state-level and in what ways this contributed to the revolutionary situation in Tunisia.

When Bourguiba took power in the 1950’s he commenced on a statist socialist economic policy. Much like Nasser he nationalized all foreign companies first, after which other companies followed. His policies were also unsuccessful, in that they led to high unemployment rates and less economic growth than was expected. Thus, like Sadat, Bourguiba’s successor tried the liberal economic route. The privatization of a vast amount of companies, and the opening up of the markets to foreign investments “accelerated the collusion between the political elite and the entrepreneurial class, which was characterized by a rapid escalation of wealth acquisition through rentier economic activity.” Ben Ali’s economic policies generated wealth, but this was lost in the pockets of the party top, and the upper ranks of the bourgeoisie. However, most wealth Ben Ali and his family kept to themselves. It has been estimated that the Ben Ali-Trabelsi clan controlled approximately 30% to 40% of the Tunisian economy.114

The people accepted Ben Ali’s authoritarian rule, and corruption because the standard of living in Tunisia was fairly high. Tunisia’s GDP growth rate has been stable since Ben Ali’s rule, the numbers generally lying between 3, and 6% per year. Inflation numbers have been even more admirable, dropping steadily to about 3% per year since Ben Ali took power, with a small upsurge in the years the world was hit by the financial crisis. This made Tunisia a role model for other Arab countries, and furthermore, a very attractive place for foreign investment, keeping the growth numbers steady. Also, since the mid-1990’s exports had been on the rise, and the tourism sector in Tunisia became very successful. The income this generated was used to improve educational and health care services, and to create enough jobs for Tunisia’s high number of university graduates, all in all raising the living standards of the middle class to one of the highest in North Africa and the Middle East. Dependent development thus was not present. However, the economic development Tunisia witnessed since the 1990’s could not prevent the rise of a number of serious structural problems, ultimately lying at the base of what caused the revolution in 2011.115

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First of all, Tunisia was plagued by regional disparities. If one takes a closer look at how wealth and resources were distributed over the different regions in Tunisia, it should come as no surprise the uprising started in the disadvantaged region of the Central West, and soon spread to the South. As the overall head count poverty rate (or the number of people living of less than two USD a day) in Tunisia sharply dropped from 32.4% in 2000 to 23.3% in 2005, and to 15.2% in 2010, in the North West the number actually dropped from 30% in 1980 to 3.7% in 2000. By contrast, in the South and Central West the poverty rate grew from 8.5 times the rate in Greater Tunis in 2000 to 14 times the rate in 2004.\(^{116}\)

For the most part, this can be traced back directly to unequal government spending. 90% Of public funds is allocated by the central government, while only 7% is managed on the local level. Of that 90% 65 to 75% is invested in the tourist-rich coastal parts of the country. As a result socioeconomic conditions are deteriorating in the South and the Central West. As infrastructure, health and educational services are lagging behind, so is private investment. What is left is an extractive economy, rich in natural resources, like oil and phosphates, which are extracted by the local populace for minimum wage only to be transferred to and processed in the North or abroad. A compounding factor is that the people who did get the chance to follow a decent education leave these poor regions for the opportunity rich North and coastal areas, only to find that they do not have the connections to find a job suited to their education. The unemployment rates per region reflect the regional disparities described above. While the overall unemployment rate stood at 13.9% in 2004, in East Central Tunisia it was approximately 10%, while some inland areas had to cope with an unemployment rate of over 50%.\(^{117}\)

This brings us to the second structural economic problem Tunisians were facing during the last decades: high unemployment rates. Although the unemployment rate declined from 16.2% in 1990 to 13% in 2010, unemployment amongst the population segment aged 15-29 was 30% in 2008, and unemployment amongst the people that have received a tertiary education has risen from a mere 3.8% in 1994 to a staggering 21.6% in 2008. This reveals an inability of the government to deal with the youth bulge in Tunisia, to create sufficient jobs for the new entries into the labour market, and to create suitable jobs for these new entries. In the meanwhile, the education system built by Bourguiba has stimulated more and more people to get a secondary or even tertiary education, and this has led to an increase of Tunisians with a secondary education from 20% in 2000 to over 70% in 2010. However, the government and the private


sector were only able to create little over 30,000 jobs in 2008, while more than 50,000 Tunisians were entering the labor market. Only a fragment of these new jobs is suited for higher educated individuals.  

Thus we see the same situation as in Egypt, a growing segment of young people in society, who do not have much hope for a bright future, despite the fact that they have had a good education. Since the economy in Tunisia was doing rather well, people view the government, and its corruption and mismanagement as the reason behind the fact that not enough jobs are being created for the newly graduated. The Tunisian state fell into its own trap: it created an impressive education system, and as a consequence one of the most literate, and well-educated people in the region, and then expected to be able to continue its unfair economic policies, and political repression. That is why Mohammed Bouazizi’s self-immolation stirred up so much protest in Tunisia. The disparate youth in Tunisia can identify itself with the college-educated Bouazizi, who was not only prevented by the government to find a job up to his level of education, but is even stripped of the right to make a few bucks a day selling fruit on the street.

Government efforts to stimulate the economy and the labor market, seemed in reality only to serve the Ben Ali’s and Trabelsi’s endeavors to increase their stronghold on the Tunisian economy. The implementation of liberalization policies meant to increase competition in the private sector and the influx of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is an example of this. As tariff walls were broken down, and the Tunisian economy opened up under agreements such as the 1995 EU-Tunisia Association Agreement, the government contradictorily controlled which enterprises and segments of the economy were open to FDI. In the end, the companies that benefited most from the influx of investments were those that were in the hands of the ruling clan, creating an alliance between Tunisia’s elite and foreign investors, or a comprador bourgeoisie if you will, characteristic of dependent development. This new elite isolated itself from the lower classes, by retreating in gated communities, and attending private schools.

A similar problem could be detected on the national level. On the one hand the government took measures to stimulate private investment (which was at 15% of the GDP before the revolution, while in countries with a similar rate of economic growth it is usually around 25%), while on the other hand it refused


to loosen its grip on the economy, so that private investment and entrepreneurship could actually blossom. Successful businessmen were squeezed out by the ruling clan, the latter forcing the former to cut the government in on the proceeds, or even to sell the government part of the enterprise. Entrepreneurs looking to start new enterprises were told by the regime that they could only proceed if the government was given a share of the new venture, sometimes up to 50%. Those unwilling to yield to these demands were harassed with administrative rump slump, high taxes, and arbitrary custom controls. Needless to say, said environment was not particularly conducive to starting up new businesses or increasing private investments, making the economy stale and non-dynamic, and the private sector unable to deal with the high number of jobless just as much as the government.\(^\text{120}\)

In the section above I have analyzed to what extent the Tunisian economy was suffering from dependent development and in what ways this lead to structural vulnerabilities on the state-level that made the coming about of a revolutionary situation possible. After analyzing data on the Tunisian economy, I conclude the Tunisian economy was not suffering from dependent development, or growth within limits. It was actually characterized by a stable growth in GDP, and inflation and unemployment numbers were not very high. However, it does have some traits of dependent development as the regime’s economic policies created high income inequality - the top 20% income earners in Tunisia were holding a share of approximately 50% of the entire national income, while for the lowest 20%, this number was 6%; a comprador bourgeoisie oriented towards Western business elites; and center-periphery relations were reproduced in Tunisian society, whereby the North, and East of Tunisia profited disproportionately from the economic growth, while the peripheral regions had to cope with an extractive economy, high unemployment, and deteriorating educational, and health care infrastructure.\(^\text{121}\)

Even though dependent development does not explain economic contradictions on the state-level in Tunisia, the demands of the protestors make it clear that economic grievances were very much the reason why the uprisings against the regime first commenced. This means we should focus on finding a variable which does explain the economic contradictions, and encompasses high income inequality, economic extraction from the periphery by the center, an alliance between the business elite, and foreign elites, but also stable economic growth, and employment and inflation numbers (at least on the macro-economic level).

What the Tunisian, and Egyptian economy have in common, is that a growing share of the population was excluded from the benefits economic growth yielded the state. Instead, this was increasingly concentrated in the pockets of a wealthy business elite which isolated itself from the rest of the population. This monopolizing of economic opportunities by the elite, had the effect of breaking the social contract between the state and the people, as the state neglected investing in the periphery, and in elevating the position of lower classes in society. This did create economic contradictions, as the regime’s predatory


behavior, and reliance on the business elite, made it unwilling and unable to implement reforms which were much needed to cope with the socioeconomic problems, especially demographic pressures, that were plaguing the disparate regions of Tunisia. As El-Khawas states: “the survival of the regime depended on maintaining stability and economic prosperity.” When the state was not able to provide this anymore, the people stopped supporting the regime.122

**External factors**

According to theory political and economic contradictions create structural vulnerabilities on the state-level, that make a state vulnerable for uprisings from below, when confronted with a world-systemic opening and external pressures. In the case of Tunisia, two such external factors can be discerned, namely the 2008 economic downturn, and the rise of social media. The fact that the EU was divided on the issue of the Jasmine Revolution, and the US was slow in responding to the crisis, widened the opposition’s room for maneuver and constrained that of the Ben Ali regime. In what ways did the world-systemic opening and the external pressures Ben Ali’s regime was faced with contribute to the emergence of the revolutionary situation?

**The 2008 economic downturn**

The economic downturn of 2008 proved to be sufficient to unravel the tacit agreement between the government and the people. When the economic downturn hit the world in 2008, Tunisia seemed to do rather well in weathering the storm. It took monetary and fiscal measures to keep the economy stable, boasting GDP growth rates of 3.1% in 2009. Inflation rates also dropped from 5% in 2008 to 3.7% in 2009, due to an increase in government spending on food subsidies, and a sharp drop in prices of several commodities as a consequence of the bursting of price bubbles as we have explained above in the case of Egypt.123

However, these numbers do not tell the whole story. As Tunisia’s economy is heavily reliant on the EU, being its biggest trading partner (approximately three-quarters of its exports are destined for the EU, and roughly the same amount of its imports originate in EU countries), the blow the Eurozone economy took in 2008 was felt in Tunisia too. The number of EU imports from Tunisia fell 15.3% in one year. Because the lion’s share of Tunisia’s exports to the EU consists of manufactured goods, energy, and agricultural products, the impact was most severe in the already disparate regions of Tunisia. Furthermore, despite positive growth numbers, Tunisia’s dependence on external demand lead to a drop of 80,000 newly created jobs in 2008 to

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123 African Manager, ‘Tunisia: Fallout from the world financial crisis on Tunisia’s economy was limited to only certain export sectors and services’, [http://africanmanager.com/site_eng/detail_article.php?art_id=15553](http://africanmanager.com/site_eng/detail_article.php?art_id=15553), consulted on 10 July 2013
57,000 in 2009, the number of graduates all the while rising. The economic crisis thus worsened the economic problems Tunisia was already dealing with.\textsuperscript{124}

These developments stood in stark contrast to the lavish lifestyle of Ben Ali and his inner circle US Ambassador Robert F. Godec describes in July 2009 embassy cables to Washington. The Ambassador recounts his dinner with Sakher El Materi, Ben Ali’s son-in-law, consisting of more than a dozen dishes, served at his lavish mansion. The house is decorated with numerous artifacts, and the master of the house even keeps a pet tiger. This brings us back to Foran’s dichotomies of just versus unjust and efficient versus inefficient governance, and the effects these ideas have on the extent to which a people perceive their government as legitimate. As the content of these cables found their way via WikiLeaks to the Tunisian people, the economy was barely starting to recover. While the government was unable to provide for its people, the inner circle elite was bathing in the luxuries they had stolen from the Tunisian people. Whatever legitimacy the Ben Ali regime had left was smashed to pieces as the cables confirmed the rumors and suspicions swirling around “the Family.”\textsuperscript{125}

Social media
The dissemination of the reports on the corruption, and extravagant lifestyles of the top elite was accelerated through social media, like Twitter, and Facebook. The role these social media have played in bringing about the Tunisian revolution have led to the developments taking place in Tunisia in the Winter of 2010-2011 being dubbed a Twitter revolution or social media revolution. Social media definitely played a role in organizing protests, disseminating information on government crackdowns, refuting false information and rumors spread by the government, and even to form networks to clean the streets, and organize neighborhood watches immediately after Ben Ali had been ousted.\textsuperscript{126}

However, Tunisian people themselves do not care for this term at all, as they tend to view the revolution more as a “revolution of dignity”, or a “revolution of the young people.” Also, they feel that the term “Twitter revolution” does not do justice to the millions of people putting their lives on the line in the street protests against the regime. In truth, the revolution in Tunisia is indeed far less a revolution caused by


social media than Western media would have its audience believe, judging by the emphasis put on the role of websites such as Facebook and Twitter played in causing the political turmoil. If one looks at the numbers, they convey a different story: Only 34.5% of the Tunisian population has access to internet. Half of those people have a Facebook account, and furthermore there were a mere 500 active Twitter-users in Tunisia during the time of the revolution. Ergo, the causes of the events that transpired in Tunisia cannot be accounted for completely by social media, as the protests were wide-spread and encompassed a broad segment of the Tunisian population.127

However, social media did influence the revolution to a certain extent. In the first place, the rise of social media in Tunisia created a safe space for people to share grievances about the regime in a society where critique of Ben Ali and his cronies was harshly repressed. Nevertheless, some nuance is imperative here, as the Ben Ali regime knew about social media as well, and monitored and censored it increasingly, making it perhaps even easier to spot dissidents. However, for those Tunisian activists who found a way around the regime’s watchful eyes on the internet it provided a secure place to share ideas and criticism about the regime. Video’s, and photo’s of the regime’s repressive activities were uploaded by them, and formed an extensive source of firsthand accounts for mainstream media outlets such as Al-Jazeera, and nawaat.org. The mainstream media aggregated, filtered, analyzed, and disseminated this information, so that the reach of the internet activists went beyond Tunisia’s 1.67 million Facebook users to almost every living room in Tunisia.128

Also, just like the case of Egypt, the rise of social media constrained the government’s ability to take violent measures against the protesters. Ben Ali was aware of this, increasing the amount of censorship in the days leading up to the revolution, and even shutting the internet down completely for four days. However, it was all in vain as raw footage of the government crackdowns on the protesters kept on finding its way to the internet. The harsh repression of a people demanding its legitimate rights, and the shut-down of the internet, only worked to fuel the people’s anger against Ben Ali, and provoked wide-spread criticism by the international community.129

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The EU and the US

For a regime like Ben Ali’s criticism by the international community is most unwelcome as it thrives on a balancing act of internal repression and outward rhetoric of democracy and liberalization. This is understood as clearly by the US and the EU as it is by Ben Ali. Both have put security, economic interests, governance, and human rights on a balancing scale with economic interests and security consistently outweighing good governance and human rights. Both claim human rights, and democracy promotion run like a red thread through their foreign policy, but praxis shows otherwise as regimes like Ben Ali’s have managed to stay in power for decades by using technology and funds received from the West to repress their own people in exchange for economic benefits, and security cooperation.130

The US, as stated above has large interests in the region. Although US-Tunisian relations are not as extensive as US-Egyptian relations, a long tradition of friendship and cooperation underpins their mutual dealings. Tunisia recognized the US as a sovereign, autonomous state as early as 1795, and the US was one of the first countries to recognize Tunisia in 1956 after it gained independence from France. Their relations intensified after Ben Ali came to power. In 2002 they signed a trade and investment framework agreement to regulate their good trade relations, and in 2003 Tunisia signed the Anti-Terrorism Law in support of the US its struggle to combat terrorism world-wide. Because of their economic and security cooperation, the US viewed Tunisia as valuable partner in the MENA, and was willing to overlook the numerous human rights abuses, and the lack of political freedom characteristic of the Ben Ali regime. It is well known, especially after WikiLeaks published the US Embassy cables on Tunisia, that the US State Department was aware of the state repression, and the flagrant corruption.131

Not surprisingly, it took the US over a month since the uprisings began to voice strong support for the Tunisian demonstrators. Although the Tunisian ambassador had been summoned by the State Department at the beginning of January 2011 to answer questions on the use of violence against protesters, and Hilary

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Clinton warned the Arab dictators in Doha on 16 January 2011 that “the region's foundations are sinking into the sand”, it maintained that it did not want to take sides in the conflict. If anything, the US was steering towards reforms, hoping it would still the young Arabs’ hunger for political freedom and economic rights, without having to endure the loss of one of its allies.132

It was not until it became crystal clear that Ben Ali’s position was untenable, that the US voiced its support for the opposition, with President Obama stating on the day of the ouster: “I condemn and deplore the use of violence against citizens peacefully voicing their opinion in Tunisia”, and “[I] call on the Tunisian government to respect human rights, and to hold free and fair elections in the near future that reflect the true will and aspirations of the Tunisian people.” Once again the US played it safe, waiting to see were all the cards would drop until it made a strong statement on the developments in Tunisia. It thus cannot be said that the superpower provided external pressure on the regime in favor of the people during the revolutionary upheaval, but they also did not come to the aid of the regime, providing a world systemic opening used by the protesters to carry through the revolution.133

In the meanwhile the EU had trouble arriving at a unanimous standpoint regarding the situation in Tunisia. Whereas EU Foreign Policy High Commissioner Lady Ashton expressed her “support and recognition to the Tunisian people and their democratic aspirations” as early as January 4th, 2011 and the UK firmly condemned the violence and called for an immediate expansion of political freedom, France and Italy defended the regime staunchly until the very last minute despite pressure of the aforementioned parties. All in all, the EU’s response was slow, incoherent, and toothless. The EU “thought that Ben Ali would be a bulwark against terrorism and that's why they had to accept his dictatorship,” as Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the head of the Green Party in the European Parliament stated after the ouster. Nevertheless, although a pro-revolution EU would have perhaps helped the opposition to oust Ben Ali sooner, a divided EU was not able to stand in its way.134

France did however, and this deserves further attention. The ties between France and its former colony are extensive, with 1,250 French businesses operating in the North African country, and some 20,000 French citizens living there. Throughout the uprisings it continued to support the Ben Ali regime. President Sarkozy was oddly silent, while his Minister of Culture tried to reassure the international community with the statement that Ben Ali being described as a dictator was “completely exaggerated.” Foreign Minister Michele Alliot-Marie even went so far as to offer Tunisia’s police the assistance of France’s with their world-132


renowned skills in crowd control, and took a privat jet owned by a Tunisian businessman with close ties to the regime to the former colony for a Christmas holiday during the uprising. On top of that, two days before Ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia the French government signed off on a shipment of tear gas canisters to Tunisia. Reportedly, the UK exerted a lot of pressure on France to condemn the regime, but to no avail.\textsuperscript{135}

In conclusion, the political and economic contradictions in Tunisia made the government unable to deal with the mounting socioeconomic problems Tunisia was facing. External pressures combined with these contradictions to create a revolutionary crisis: the economic crisis exacerbated the grievances of the people, and lead to more and more individual outcries of citizens against the regime; social media provided a forum on which individuals could share these grievances, and also show the world the repression the regime was employing. A world-systemic opening was provided as a consequence of the paralysis in EU decision-making on this issue, and the US its cautious response to the uprisings. This isolated Ben Ali in the international community, and constrained his room for maneuver, while widening that of the opposition. As a consequence, Ben Ali could not handle the revolutionary crisis, which made that the protests did not subside, and gained momentum as more and more people joined the uprising.

**Conjuncture and mass uprisings**

Mohammed Bouazizi’s self-immolation triggered a chain of events that led to Ben Ali’s downfall. However, the seeds of the revolution had been planted long before December 2010. The strategies the regime employed to keep the personalist, authoritarian Ben Ali regime in place, had changed the relation between the state and the dominant class, and between the dominant class and the producing class in Tunisia. The political and economic contradictions this brought about on the state-level made the regime unable to deal with crises of the state, like the mounting demographic pressures, and regional disparities. External pressures, and a world-systemic opening gave agents the chance to ignite a mass uprising, which in the end lead to Ben Ali’s departure.

The regime had closed an unwritten social contract with the people, whereby political freedom was sacrificed for a decent standard of living, and Tunisians had access to free health care and education, food subsidies and a guaranteed job in the public sector. However, as Bourguiba’s socialist policies did not generate the income needed to sustain these means of cooptation, Ben Ali turned to neoliberalism in an effort

to stimulate the economy. This was also a strategic response to external pressures, as Western countries were prepared to invest a lot in Tunisia. At the time, liberalization of the economy was seen as intrinsically connected to democratization processes which would stimulate stability in the Middle East.

The effects have been described above: instead of stimulating economic development, it lead to the exclusion of a growing number of people from participating in the economy: there was economic growth, but also rising unemployment in the peripheral regions, and other socioeconomic developments with especially adverse effects on the lower classes. The dividends the neoliberal course, and Foreign Direct Investments yielded the state, ended up in the pockets of Ben Ali and his cronies, and created a dominant elite made up of businessmen linked to the Ben Ali regime and foreign elite. People with no connections to the Ben Ali-Trabelsi clan suffered from the new course as there was a lot of job loss in the public sector, and food subsidies were cut due to neoliberal reforms. Also, it strengthened the division between the rich center, and poor periphery in Tunisia. The explosive population growth exacerbated the economic problems for those who were not a part of the elite.

In conclusion, the relation between the state and the dominant elite, and the producing class had changed. The state became more and more intermeshed with the business elite, as the ones who profited most from the neoliberal course were Ben Ali, his wife Leila Trabelsi, and their extended family. If members of the elite dared to defy the regime their assets were confiscated and liquidated. Furthermore, the dominant class started to distance itself more and more from the producing class, literally retreating in gated communities, and sending their kids to private schools instead of to the public schools which were deteriorating in quality. This goes for health care too, as the rich Tunisians made use of private hospitals, while the poor went to public hospitals which were increasingly unable to uphold a decent standard of care due to neglect by the government.

Because of the intermeshing of the interests of the regime with those of the dominant elite, the government did not feel pressed to address the economic grievances of the people. In this the government made a crucial mistake, as the demographic developments in Tunisia created a youth bulge, and subsequently a growing number of unemployed young people, and people living below the poverty line, geographically concentrated in the Central-West and Southern regions of Tunisia. The economic crisis worsened the conditions for the people in these regions up to a point that all that was needed for them to go out on the street was a trigger. The social contract was broken.

Mohammed Bouazizi’s self-immolation would provide this trigger. The night of his self-immolation his family, neighbors and youth sympathizing with his act of despair marched to the local police station to express their grievances. Riots between the police and young people from Sidi Bouzid ensued. In the following week protests spread to neighboring villages and cities. The young people who made up the lion’s share of the protestors, their demands were socio-economic. They berated the lack of socioeconomic
opportunities, and deteriorating health care and educational infrastructure in the peripheral regions of Tunisia.136

In the years leading up the revolution, protests, little in number as they were, mostly centered around themes like human rights, and political freedom. These failed to mobilize the population on a mass scale. The economic grievances, however, did have the potential to catch on amongst a wide segment of the population. The socioeconomic grievances were not just shared amongst the lower classes, the middle class, and even part of the business elite also felt increasingly alienated and duped by the regime.137

The trade unions in Tunisia extended the uprisings both geographically, and into the political sphere according to a report by the International Crisis Group. The Secondary School Teachers Union, affiliated to the national trade union UGGT, leaders were the first group to politicize the protests, calling Bouazizi’s suicide “a political assassination” by the regime. Other local and regional branches of the UGGT followed in supporting and politicizing the uprisings. When security forces cracked down on the protests in Sidi Bouzid, they also started to organize protests in other regions, to relieve pressure on the region. Other actors joined in, like the National Council for the Bar Association, which organized protests in the South and North of Tunisia, amongst which in the capital of Tunis. The political character of the uprisings was also demonstrated by the fact that protestors started to attack police stations, and RCD offices.138

As the protests took on the character of a revolutionary mass uprising, not just calling for the government to address the socioeconomic grievances of the people, but also demanding political freedom, the isolation of Ben Ali and the Trabelsi’s became increasingly clear. RCD party members refused to stage pro-regime protests, as they had not reaped any benefits from being loyal to the regime. Ministers, who’s access to the executive was strictly controlled by the president’s extended family, remained silent or spoke out in favor of the protestors. Even businessmen joined the protests, having seen their profits end up in the deep pockets of the Ben Ali’s and Trabelsi’s. The regime’s legitimacy was at an all time low and the protests wide-spread and increasingly all-encompassing. Promises made by Ben Ali on political reforms, the creation of 300,000 new jobs and his departure in 2014, were too little, too late.139

As in the case of Egypt, the regime turned to repression when legitimacy could not be restored. The violent repression of the protests found its way into almost every Tunisian home through social media, and media stations aggregating and disseminating this footage via satellite tv. This in turn angered the gross of

the Tunisian people, who were now directly confronted with the violence employed by the government even if not living in a region affected yet by the uprisings.  

However, next to the lower classes, and elite, Ben Ali had also managed to alienate a big part of his security apparatus. The army felt neglected and was underequipped due to low investments made by the government. The police force, which had played a crucial role in Ben Ali’s rise to power had staged a protest itself recently, demanding higher wages. The only part of the security apparatus which was still completely loyal to the President was the Revolutionary Guard, an elite security force tasked with protecting the President and his family. Their numbers were too little to suppress the uprising and soon they withdrew from the affected regions. When the army was asked to step in, it displayed its loyalty to the people, instead of to the regime, refusing to shoot at the protestors.  

On 14 January 2011 the general strike called for by the UGGT, and the protests in Tunis had cornered the President in his palace in Carthage. With the army refusing to step in and the security forces unable to quell the protests, Ben Ali’s only option left was to flee the country. He departed for France, but was not granted permission to land by President Sarkozy, and ultimately found refuge in Saudi Arabia.

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Libya

In August 2011, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi’s forty-year-old regime in Libya was torn down by rebels aided by NATO-air strikes. Gaddafi himself went into hiding, while his wife and children fled to Algeria. On October 20, 2011, rebels caught Gaddafi, and murdered him, after which Libya was declared free. In this last case, I analyze the political contradictions that contributed to his demise, in the form of a strong personalist, authoritarian dictatorship. Then I analyze the presence of dependent development, which leads to economic contradictions causing revolutions according to theory. Lastly, I analyze the presence of external pressures and a world systemic opening and in what ways they have contributed to the coming about of a revolutionary situation. I also take a look at the mechanisms Gaddafi employed to maintain regime stability, namely strategies for legitimation, cooptation, elite change, strategic responses to external pressures, and imitative institution building. It was a mixture of these mechanisms that kept the regime in power for so long. However, in the end Libya’s political and economic system lead to political, and economic contradictions which made Gaddafi unable to deal with crises of the state. This gave agents the room to ignite mass uprisings which lead to the end of the regime.¹⁴³

Political contradictions

Theory tells us personalist, authoritarian, repressive regimes lead to political contradictions on the state-level, which combined with economic contradictions leads to structural vulnerabilities on the state-level. When confronted with external pressures and a world-systemic opening, these contradictions can paralyze the state, making it unable to deal with said pressures and leading to broad-based cross class uprisings from below. To answer the question as to what extent Libya had an authoritarian regime, we have to analyze its political system and see if we can find the criteria characteristic of authoritarian regimes Baker listed, namely a highly centralized authority, and decision-making structures; presence of a control structure to stifle dissent and maintain order; top-down rule from the leader to the masses through use of a wide-spread bureaucracy; a large civil service sector to represent the state all the way down to the local levels of society; prevalence of nepotism over merit; wide-spread corruption; patron-client relationships between the leader and the elite; and a lack of horizontal political checks. We will also research to what extent the regime was personalist. In order to find the answer to this, we have to go back to the two questions posed by Barbara Geddes: who decides who gets to govern? And who makes policy?¹⁴⁴

After the Free Officers of Libya staged a military coup in 1969, the monarchy was abolished and Muammar Gaddafi consolidated his power over the state of Libya. As state structures were weak at this time, this gave Gaddafi full power to shape the landscape of the state entirely to his liking. The basis for this was Jamahiriya (roughly translated “State of the Masses”), Gaddafi’s own vision on politics and economics, as set out in his Green Book. Infused with Arab socialist, and nationalist ideas, the most important feature of

¹⁴⁴ B. Geddes, 'Authoritarian breakdown', Department of Political Science UCLA, 2004, p.4-6; W. Lacher, 'Families, tribes, and cities in the Libyan Revolution', Middle East Policy, 18 (4) 2011, p.140
this state ideology is a complete rejection of all forms of parliamentary representation as “Parliament is a misrepresentation of the people, and parliamentary systems are a false solution to the problem of democracy.” In theory, the people were supposed to govern themselves through a system of popular conferences. Political parties were forbidden as well, leading to oligarchies only representing a small fraction of the population according to Gaddafi. A different motivation for abolishing political parties, however, might be that the absence of them made it more difficult for the opposition in Libya to challenge the regime.145

On the local level Basic People’s Conferences were instated, wherein government policy was formed and supervised. Each member of society above the age of 19 was to be a member of one of these conferences, by virtue of his or her citizenship. These conferences were tasked with appointing a secretariat and People’s Committee, which was responsible for the execution of policy. Also, the secretariats and People’s Committees gathered at least once a year on the national level, in the form of the General People’s Congress. The resolutions adopted by this Congress were in turn implemented on the local level by the People’s Committees. According to Gaddafi this was the only true form of democracy, and he hoped that his model would be adopted by other countries as well.146

In reality, Gaddafi ruled through a number of parallel state structures, and the playing off of these against each other, as he also did with factions within these different structures. The Jamahiriya structure itself was nothing but a mere renaming of institutions traditionally associated with popular representation void of any real power, according to Gaub. The General People’s Congress was the official legislative branch of government, comparable to a parliament in its structure and functions. The General People’s Committee could be considered the executive, with its secretary general acting as a Prime Minister. The other secretaries were each in charge of their own portfolio, like health, and education, basically performing the tasks of ministers. Gaddafi had filled the General People’s Committee and Congress with regime loyalists, not looking to the people for legislative input or supervision, but his inner circle.147

Furthermore, says Gaub, Gaddafi kept some policy areas of special priority to the Libyan state outside the Jamahiriya structure. In the first place, Libya did not have a Minister of Defense, defense policy instead being the responsibility of one of his closest confidants and fellow Free Officer Abu Bakr Junis. Oil policy was in the hands of the National Oil Cooperation. This government-run cooperation had nationalized almost 70% of the Libyan oil industry since 1969, and was responsible for the Exploring and Production Sharing Agreements with international oil companies. Since 2006 the NOC was led by Shukri Ghanem, another regime loyalist brought in by Gaddafi’s son Saif al Islam.148

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To keep the official institutions weak, Gaddafi engaged in the process of elite change, regularly committing purges, creating and dissolving ministries, and reshuffling cabinet positions numerous times amongst essentially the same crowd of people he had executed the coup with in 1969. Testament to this fact is that Libya had only 112 ministers in the thirty years following the coup. Also, there was a lot of overlap in functions of the different institutions, which brought chaos and rivalry with it, enabling Gaddafi “to maintain an orchestrated chaos in which he likes to be regarded as the voice of wisdom.” It also allowed him to weed out people not considered loyal to the regime and keep those close who were.\textsuperscript{149}

Real input on matters of the state came from Gaddafi’s inner circle, also known as the “Men of the Tent”, made up of family members, Free Officers, and key members of his Qadadfa-tribe. This group is purely informal, as its members are dependent on Gaddafi and have no independent power or influence. As such, he could depose of them at will. By tying their fate to his, and playing off different factions against each other, Gaddafi managed to hold on tight to the reins of power. Gaddafi also used this tactic to keep control over the vast amount of tribes Libya has.\textsuperscript{150}

For example, since the late 1990’s a reformist current has developed within the regime. Gaddafi’s new, more conciliatory attitude towards the international community, as demonstrated by the extradition of the Lockerbie suspects to the Hague, and the cessation of Libya’s WMD program, was paired with the idea to implement internal reforms. The reformist faction in the government was lead by Gaddafi’s son Saif Al-Islam, who pleaded for more transparency, openness, and democracy, next to economic liberalization. He brought in confidants of his own, like the above-mentioned Shukri Ghanem. The statist, old guard, amongst which Musa Kusa, Gaddafi’s former head of external intelligence, and Abdullah Al-Senussi, director of Military Intelligence under Gaddafi, felt threatened by this rival faction, and systematically blocked all attempts by Ghanem and Al-Islam to implement economic reforms. Gaddafi for his part, thrived under the tensions within his government, as this provided another opportunity for him to consolidate his own power.\textsuperscript{151}

Gaddafi used Libya’s plethora of tribes (estimated to be 140 in total) in a similar vain. Although in the years following the military coup he tried to diminish the role of tribes in society, by stripping influential...
tribes of their power and posts and replacing them by regime loyalists, Gaddafi came to realize he needed the support of the tribes to stay in power. He had a falling out with several of the Free Officers he led the coup with, and his popularity was diminishing. To consolidate his power once again he made alliances with important Libyan tribes, the most important ones being his own Qadadfa tribe, the Warfalla tribe (comprising more than one million people, out of a population of six million), and the Magarha, the second largest tribe in Libya. He employed a method of “carrots and sticks”, rewarding the tribes loyal to him with influential government positions, and job opportunities. The tribes who dared to defy him, like the Warfalla tribe in 1993, were punished severely and violently. Gaddafi even went so far as to install a code of honor, which entailed that tribes could be punished collectively for tribe members dissenting.\(^\text{152}\)

Next to these politics of tribal and elite rivalry, Gaddafi had two other means of making sure he stayed in power. The first is cooptation, in the form of an extensive system of patronage, upon which we touched in the paragraphs above. By buying the loyalty of certain tribes, he built alliances strong enough not to be challenged by other tribes. Furthermore, he did the same thing to certain powerful families in society, and to civil servants, who in turn created their own networks of patron-clients. Paying for this system with the huge amount of oil revenues he was able to spend at his own discretion, he created a patronage network at the top of which he stood, permeating the whole state.\(^\text{153}\)

However, as Machiavelli says “it is better to be feared than loved”, and thus Gaddafi needed a strong arm at his disposition to deal with dissidents. The army he did not trust as a consequence of a series of failed coups, so they were kept weak, divided and under strict government control. Also, Gaddafi attempted to organize the defense of the country on the local level by installing local brigades, but they were not well trained or equipped. Besides this, he created Revolutionary Committees, charged with eliminating dissent in every possible way. The members of these Committees infiltrated all aspects of society, amongst which the academic world, and even embassies abroad (also known as the “Stray Dog campaign”) to hunt down people


disloyal to the revolution, and make an example out of them by torturing them, and oftentimes killing them in the eye of the public.\textsuperscript{154}

In the section above I have analyzed to what extent Libya was a personalist, authoritarian, repressive regime, and in what ways this has contributed to the coming about of the revolutionary situation of 2011. In the end we can say that Gaddafi’s regime was most certainly a highly personalist, authoritarian one. Gaddafi managed to control all aspects of society by creating institutions completely dependent on his persona, and thus fiercely loyal to the regime, by playing of different factions against each other, and through a policy of fierce repression effectively killing all room for opposition in Libya. He decided who had access to the center of power, and he decided on all policies made This made the regime stale, and unable to truly implement reforms when necessary. Also, just like in Egypt, and Tunisia, people had no channels through which to voice their grievances to the regime. This structural feature combined with economic contradictions creating the revolutionary situation of 2011.

\textbf{Economic contradictions}

According to theory, economic systems characterized by dependent development are prone to create economic contradictions on the state-level, that combined with political contradictions and a world-systemic opening and external pressures, leads to a revolutionary situation. In the following section we will research the extent to which dependent development was present in Libya in 2011, and in what ways this has contributed to the coming about of a revolutionary situation. Firstly, I describe Libya’s economic system under Gaddafi and how it has evolved over the decades he was in power. I look at the growth in GDP, inflation numbers, and unemployment percentages. Also, I analyze how this affected the position of the different classes in Libyan society.

When Libya became an independent state in 1951, the economy was severely underdeveloped. Agriculture accounted for 70\% of the labor opportunities and 30\% of the GDP. The only export product was scrap-metal left from World War II, and illiteracy was wide-spread. The new monarch supplemented the country’s income by allowing British and American military bases on its soil in exchange for aid, making Libya the largest recipient of US aid in 1959. For a time it seemed like Libya’s economy was doomed to be dependent on foreign assistance.\textsuperscript{155}

Things drastically turned around for Libya with the discovery of oil in 1959. Within a year over 35 oil wells had been drilled. Within twenty years the share of oil rents out of total government revenue grew from 0\% to 83.1\%. Libya’s economy became dualistic: there was the oil sector, and the non-oil sector. There was little exchange between these two economies, besides the employment of a small number of Libyans, and the transfer of royalties and taxes to the government by foreign oil companies. On the one hand, the revenues this gained the government led to an increase of per capita income from 25 US dollars in 1959 to

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When Gaddafi and the Free Unionist Officers deposed of the king in 1969 another watershed of change commenced. Gaddafi tried to rally the population behind him with socialist, nationalist, and anti-imperialist rhetoric, much like Nasser did in Egypt. Foreign workers and companies were replaced by Libyan ones, as far as possible. Also, foreign banks, and insurance companies were closed or nationalized. Oil companies were either nationalized or had to make concessions to the government, sometimes up to 75%. Foreign direct investment was curtailed, and foreign trade in the hands of the government. Lastly, the National Organization for Supply Command was set up, which controlled the import of basic consumer items. For a long time, these socialist policies, and anti-imperialist rhetoric gained Gaddafi the legitimacy amongst the people he needed to rule uncontested.\footnote{U.S. Library of Congress, ‘Libya: Agriculture’, http://countrystudies.us/libya/58.htm, consulted on 19 June 2013; M. Gaddafi, The Green Book, The Public Establishment for Publishing, Advertising, and Distribution (Ottowa 1982)

Gaddafi’s efforts to create equality were detrimental to the private sector. Renting houses was no longer allowed, as everyone should just have one house according to Gaddafi. He abolished all rental contracts, and instead had people pay a mortgage fee to the government every month. He tried to undermine retailers by setting up large state-owned supermarkets with lower prices. Furthermore, private ownership was abolished and workers were encouraged to manage their own co-operations through workers committees.\footnote{U.S. Library of Congress, ‘Libya: Role of the government’, http://countrystudies.us/libya/59.htm, consulted on 19 June 2013; M. Gaddafi, The Green Book, The Public Establishment for Publishing, Advertising, and Distribution (Ottowa 1982), p.43-47}

The results of Gaddafi’s extreme socialist policies were mixed. On the one hand, he did manage to raise the living standards of Libyans, by investing heavily in education, agriculture, and industry. Also, a food subsidy system was put in place, and all taxes except a “jihad tax” (for the struggle against Israel) were abolished. On the other hand, his ardent wish to be self-sufficient (up to the point he even ordered all Libyans to raise chickens in 1978 to advance this goal), was adversely affected by his policy of undermining the private sector. Also, Gaddafi’s unique style of socialism, and the benefits it brought the population only existed by the grace of its oil wealth. There was little economic development outside the industrial sector and the quality of education was too low to create a workforce of highly skilled employees, leading to a situation in which Libya was still dependent on outside forces.\footnote{U.S. Library of Congress, ‘Libya: Role of the government’, http://countrystudies.us/libya/59.htm, consulted on 19 June 2013; R.B. St.John, ‘The Changing Libyan Economy: Causes and Consequences’, Middle East Journal, 62 (1) 2008,
The volatility of the rentier economy became painfully clear to Libya in the 1980’s. Struck by falling oil prices, and US sanctions (and from 1992 on also UN sanctions), foreign reserves and government revenue decreased from 36.5% in 1980 to 20.8% in 2000. Wages were frozen, decreasing the purchasing power of Libyans, the state-run supermarkets could not supply all basic consumer goods anymore, and investment in agriculture and industrialization came to a halt. Per capita income dropped from 11,739 US dollars in 1980 to 5,453 US dollars in 2001. Worst of all, the sanctions did not only affect the oil industry, they also caused a shortage of spare parts and raw materials with dual use, thus also affecting health care, and agriculture.160

Gaddafi realized all too well that Libya’s economic problems were endangering his political position. In response, he tried to resolve Libya’s economic woes by taking a two-pronged approach according to the International Crisis Group: making an effort to end Libya’s international isolation, and taking careful steps in the direction of economic liberalization. Firstly, Gaddafi handed over the suspects of the Lockerbie bombing for trial to the Hague, after which UN sanctions were lifted in 1999. The US followed in 2004 after Libya ceased its Weapons of Mass Destruction program.161

After the sanctions had been lifted, GDP growth rates rose to 9% in 2005, then dropped to 6% in 2006, where they remained stable until the 2008 economic downturn. Inflation rates, which had been as high as 18% in 1999, sharply dropped to 1% in 2001, and slowly increased to 3% in 2006. Unemployment rates remained stable at 30% from 1998 until 2004. Except for the high unemployment rates, the numbers seem to indicate Libya had a fairly stable economy. However, these numbers are deceptive as the lifting of the economic sanctions made it possible for Gaddafi again to compensate for his economic mismanagement with oil revenues. This is typical for rentier economies, which are defined by Hazem Al Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani as economies in which rent situations predominate; which are characterized by a weak domestic production sector; in which only a small part of the population works in the sector which is generating the rent; and in which the state appropriates the lion’s share of the revenues the rent yields.162

Secondly, room for private enterprise was expanded. The government monopoly on foreign trade was lifted, the state-run supermarkets abolished, and people were even encouraged to take out loans to start private enterprises. Also, Gaddafi tried to attract Foreign Direct Investment not only for the oil sector, but also for tourism, and the service sector in general. He was even quoted as saying: “Libya wants to encourage foreign capital investment and partnership, not only for the benefit of this country but for the entire African

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continent to which Libya is the gateway for Europe... We will create the right atmosphere for the investor."163

However, years of economic mismanagement and the destruction of the private sector made reforming the economy a difficult task. In 2003, oil revenues still accounted for 50% of the GDP, 75% of exports, and 97% of government revenues. The public sector was still bloated, employing over 800,000 people out of a population of 6 million, and accounting for 75% of all employment. Private investment stood at a mere 2% of GDP. Furthermore, Libyans were complaining about the corruption the new policies brought with it. Liberalization made it possible for those closest to the regime to obtain enormous wealth by setting up construction companies, private airline companies, and telecommunications businesses. The new business elite was oriented towards the West, and out of touch with the economic needs of the lower classes. For the rest of the population of Libya not tied to the regime, the slight reforms did nothing to improve their situation as it was impossible for them to get through the red tape of the government bureaucracy to obtain the licenses, and loans they needed to engage in private enterprise.164

Next to this, unemployment rates were still very high before the revolution started, as economic diversification had not come to fruition yet, and most Libyans are not skilled enough to work in the oil sector. These developments combined with demographic pressures like the fact that more than 50% of the population is under 20. A large share of this group has already entered the labor market or soon will, creating an even larger group of unskilled workers for whom there is no place anymore in the public sector, and no place yet in the private sector.165

Gaddafi used oil wealth to placate the economic hardships the people were facing, by providing direct and indirect subsidies, free housing, and even free cars. A social contract dependent on the international price of oil is as volatile as the oil market itself, however. Also, the Libyan people felt that even though the standard of living was one of the highest in North Africa, that in comparison to other countries rich in natural resources like oil, for example Dubai, they were poor. In the end, when it comes to grievances, they will not be about the standard of living in absolute terms, but in relative terms, as people cannot help forming expectations, and comparing themselves to others.

In the section above I have described Libya’s economic structure under the Gaddafi regime. In short, thirty years of economic mismanagement has led to the destruction of the Libyan economy. Libya was not suffering from dependent development though, as its inflation and GDP rates were fairly stable. The term rentier economy would be more apt to describe the economic structure in Libya. However, as in the case of

Egypt, and Tunisia, economic grievances were at least in part the reason why people went out into the streets to protest the regime. We can find certain commonalities with the economic situations in Tunisia, and Egypt before the revolutions, namely that a large share of the population was excluded from participating in the economy; only the dominant elite which had connections to the regime could profit from the economic opportunities the neoliberal reforms created; the very wealthy business elite, oriented towards the West this created; and growing income inequality between the dominant elite, and lower classes. This economic situation led to economic contradictions on the state-level. The reforms Gaddafi implemented only benefitted him and those closest to the regime. As Gaddafi’s power was increasingly based on the support of the business elite after the implementation of neoliberal reforms, he recoiled from implementing reforms that would elevate the position of the lower class in Libya, as this may be at the cost of the unbridled amassing of wealth by the business elite and regime cronies. This in turn made him unable to subdue the economic grievances, as they were never really addressed.

**External factors**

Theory tells us political and economic contradictions lead to a revolutionary situation when the state in question is confronted by a crisis of the state, which it cannot handle because of said political and economic contradictions. In the following section I analyze the role of external pressures and a world-systemic opening in the revolutionary crisis in Libya, and find out that in none other of our case studies external factors were so crucial in deciding the outcome of the conflict between the government and its people, than in Libya. I analyze the influence of the 2008 economic downturn, the Jasmine and Nile revolutions, and social media first. After that, I research if there was a world-systemic opening present, constraining Gaddafi’s room for maneuver, and widening that of the opposition. To what extent were external pressures and a world-systemic opening present in Libya on the eve of the revolutionary upheaval? In what ways did they contribute to the coming about of this situation?

**Economic downturn**

Like Tunisia, and Egypt, the economic downturn of 2008 effected Libya adversely, albeit to a lesser extent. On the one hand, the drastic drop in oil prices between July and December 2008 from 130 USD per barrel to 40 USD per barrel affected the economy as oil revenues made up 97% of government revenues. However, oil prices stabilized as early as April 2009 at 50 USD per barrel. GDP numbers dove below zero in 2009, leading to a greater share of government expenditure as a percentage of GDP. Also, Libya experienced the same sharp drop in prices of food commodities and subsequent increase in prices as Tunisia, and Egypt, leading to higher inflation numbers at the beginning of the crisis. 166

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Libya was able to weather the storm due to the fact that the economic crisis started around the same time that Libya’s international sanctions were all lifted. Hassan Y. Aly and Mark C. Strazicich sharply note that it in some ways the crisis actually played to Libya’s advantage as the crisis made it possible for the former international pariah to acquire major international assets at a sharp price. Furthermore, it is precisely because Libya was not fully integrated into the world market that it did not suffer as much from the crisis as countries like Tunisia, which has extensive trade relations with the European Union. However, economic grievances were very much a cause of the revolution, and the economic downturn exacerbated these. GDP rates dropped below zero in 2009, and inflation rates rose to 10%.167

Social media

The uprising in Libya started with calls to action by anonymous activists on the internet. The Facebook page galvanizing Libyans in and outside of Libya to participate in a “Day of Rage”, had 4400 likes on Monday February 14th, 2011, which quickly grew to 9600 on February 16th. And this was before the protests commenced on February 17th, when the number of likes grew to 82,000. The government reacted by imposing an internet black-out, making almost all internet traffic within Libya, and to and from the outside world impossible. This was added to the block already resting on YouTube and a number of international opposition websites, like Al-Youm, which had been in place since January 24th. The government also sent out a warning via text message, informing its population that anyone participating in the demonstrations of February 17th risked being hit by live ammunition. It shows that both the government and the protesters had learned from the uprisings in Tunisia, and Egypt; the battle is not just fought in the field, it is also played out in the media, as the New York Times reported on the Libyan struggle.168

A crucial factor in this is whether protesters manage to get footage and information on the uprising and government crackdowns across the border. Next to the internet black-out, Gaddafi installed checkpoints

at the Tunisian, and Egyptian border where SIM-cards and smart phones were systematically destroyed in order to prevent this from happening. Nevertheless, both the checkpoints and the black-out proved to be less than waterproof as raw footage still found its way to YouTube, and other social media. In Libya, Google still reported some internet activity, even after the shutdown. People used this to upload video’s to social media websites like Twitvid and Facebook, which in turn were posted on YouTube by sympathizers abroad. Within a week since February 17th 9500 video’s tagged '#Libya', had been posted on YouTube.\footnote{The Guardian, P. Beaumont, 'The Truth about Twitter, Facebook, and the Uprisings in the Arab World', 25 February 2011, www.theguardian.com/world/2011/feb/25/twitter-facebook-uprisings-arab-libya, consulted on 23 August 2013; Social Times, M. O'Neill, 'How YouTube is aiding the Libyan Revolution', 26 February 2011, socialtimes.com/youtube-libyan-revolution_b39678, consulted on 22 August 2013; The Christian Science Monitor, G. Goodale, 'In Libya, perfecting the art of revolution by Twitter', 10 May 2011, www.csmonitor.com/USA/2011/0510/In-Libya_perfecting-the-art-of-revolution-by-Twitter, consulted on 22 August 2013}

Outside of Libya several websites created by sympathizers of the uprising played a crucial role in processing this information. Raw footage and information was aggregated, translated, and disseminated by websites such as www.libfeb17.com and nawaat.org. Where restrictions imposed by the government made it impossible to gather enough information on the situation on the ground, the founders of these websites turned to methods such as Live Phone Calls (LPC’s), using landlines or mobile phones to reach people in the area to get an update. Their accounts were subsequently tweeted and the recordings published for anyone interested in what was going on.\footnote{BostInno, 'The Libyan Revolution Through Social Media', 22 August 2011, bostinno.streetwise.co/2011/08/22/the-libyan-revolution-through-social-media/, consulted on 23 August 2013; Libya Watanona, www.libya-watanona.com, consulted on 23 August 2013; Z. Harb, 'Arab Revolutions and the Social Media Effect', M/C Journal, 14 (2) 2011, journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/viewArticle/364/0, consulted on 23 August 2013; Channel 4 News, 'Arab Revolt: Social Media and the People's Revolution', 25 February 2011, www.channel4.com/news/arab-revolt-social-media-and-the-peoples-revolution, consulted on 23 August 2013; Libya 17th February 2011, www.libfeb17.com, consulted on 23 August 2013; Nawaat, www.nawaat.org, consulted on 23 August 2013}

Even international organizations like the United Nations, and NATO made use of the stream of information reaching the outside world via Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook. The United Nations used it to create a crisis map, purveying where and which humanitarian supplies were needed. NATO Wing Commander Bracken admitted the defense alliance “oversees and regulates sites like Twitter to gather intelligence in such areas as Libya where ground troops are not allowed to go”, such as coordinates. Earlier on, the NATO conveyed that there were volunteers helping on the ground via social media to get the information needed, and that it could use more informers.\footnote{Policy and Internet, S. Stottlemyre, 'Did Libyan crisis mapping create usable military intelligence?', 14 March 2013, blogs.oii.ox.ac.uk/policy/did-libyan-crisis-mapping-create usable-military-intelligence/, consulted 24 August 2013; The Globe and Mail, G. Smith, 'How social media users are helping NATO fight Gadhafi in Libya', 14 June 2011, http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/how-social-media-users-are-helping-nato-fight-gadhafi-in-libya/article583325/, consulted on 23 August 2013; The Guardian, R. Norton-Taylor and N. Hopkins, 'Libya airstrikes: NATO uses Twitter to help gather targets', 15 June 2011, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jun/15/libya-nato-gathers-targets-twitter, consulted on 23 August 2013}

In this case, we might carefully draw the conclusion that social media did not only give the opposition in Libya a sympathetic vote by the international community, but that it actually provided the NATO and rebels with a tactical advantage. However, as in the case of Egypt, and Tunisia, the knife cuts
both ways. Thanks to social media, Gaddafi had the opportunity to mobilize troops in the East well before the uprising for example.\textsuperscript{172}

\textit{International community}

Unlike Tunisia and Egypt, Libya has not had good relations with the West since Gaddafi took power in 1969. As a consequence of the Gaddafi regime’s involvement in several terrorist activities, amongst which the bombing of a Pan Am-flight over Lockerbie, Scotland, it has become subject to a wide array of sanctions imposed by the US, the EU, and the United Nations. In recent years, economic hardship made it necessary for Gaddafi to try and come out of the cold by improving relations with the West, in which he succeeded astoundingly well. Several of the sanctions were lifted, and relations with a number of countries, primarily France, were warming up.\textsuperscript{173}

However, as the conflict in Libya broke loose, and Gaddafi used his own militias against people protesting his all-encompassing state rule, and economic mismanagement, the international community intervened. The United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 1970 (2011) and 1973 (2011), condemning the violence in Libya, and giving the NATO a mandate to protect civilians by “all necessary measures.” The resolutions also referred a number of regime officials to the International Criminal Court (for the second time in history, and the first time by unanimous vote), imposed a No-Fly Zone, an arms embargo, and condemned the use of violence against the rebels. Although the members of the Security Council seem to have had a different idea on what the contents of resolution 1973 entailed in retrospect, France, and Britain amongst others took the opportunity to aid the rebels as much as needed to ultimately establish regime change.\textsuperscript{174}

In this respect, the situation in Libya also differs significantly from Tunisia, and Egypt. While we have established that in the latter two countries there was at least a partially permissive world-context because of the fact that the EU and the US could not intervene, the international context Gaddafi was operating in, was openly hostile. Gaddafi has been an annoyance for the West for years, and at the same time is sitting on a vast reserve of oil. It is thus not surprising that when the Security Council basically gave the NATO \textit{carte blanche}, the West took the opportunity to get rid of Gaddafi once and for all. An additional


factor might be that the struggle in Libya was much more violent and bloody than the uprisings in Egypt, and Tunisia. Within a month since the Day of Rage, 2,000 civilian deaths were counted.\(^{175}\)

It is debatable whether or not humanitarian intervention is the right path to take in situations like these, and the question remains if Operation Unified Protector did not increase human suffering, instead of diminishing it. The debate on humanitarian intervention versus state sovereignty is an inexhaustible one which we will not get into now, however. The point is that the NATO did aid the rebels in overthrowing the Gaddafi regime. It armed the rebels, bombed strategic military targets, and enforced a weapons embargo giving the rebels a major military advantage in the struggle which would have otherwise been a long, and protracted affair. The international community through institutions like the United Nations, and NATO provided the rebels with a permissive world context, allowing them to overthrow Gaddafi.

\textit{The uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia}

Since the protests in Libya started in February 2011, one can assume the protestors in Libya were influenced by the events that transpired in Egypt, and Tunisia in the months before. According to Bell and Wither Gaddafi’s response to the revolutionary uprisings in Tunisia, and Egypt actually partially contributed to the coming about of mass uprisings in Libya itself. Next to publicly voicing support for his Egyptian and Tunisian colleagues, he also tried to prevent uprisings, fearing the same fate would befall him, by meeting with political activists, releasing political prisoners, promising reforms, and contradictorily arresting Fathi Terbil, a human rights activist. Bell and Winter state that this only angered the people, and stimulated them to protest the regime.\(^{176}\)

Furthermore, as stated above in the social media section of this chapter: Gaddafi and the protestors had learned from the uprisings in Tunisia, and Egypt that the battle is also fought in the media, and so the protestors did their best to get footage on the brutal repression of the regime onto social media sites, and Gaddafi for his part staged pro-regime protests, trying to send the message to the Libyan people and the international community that he still had the support of the people.\(^{177}\)

In the section above I have analyzed to what extent external pressures and a world-systemic opening have contributed to the emergence of a revolutionary situation in Libya in 2011. Also, I have analyzed to what extent a world-systemic opening was present, giving the Libyan rebels the chance to tear down the regime. Gaddafi’s stronghold on the Libyan political landscape and the neoliberal reforms he introduced lead to political and economic contradictions on the state-level, which made the regime vulnerable for revolts from below. According to theory these vulnerabilities can lead to a revolution when the state is confronted with a crisis, like an economic downturn, or war. Also, as Skocpol states: historic or technological developments

can have an influence on revolutionary situations elsewhere. Gaddafi could not handle the political and economic grievances of the people by implementing reforms as his power was based on the support of a small group of conservatists and neoliberal regime loyalists. Reforms granting the people more political freedom, or economic opportunities, would be at the cost of the power, and opportunities of this dominant elite. Thus when the Jasmine and Nile revolutions started to gain momentum Gaddafi was scared this would affect Libya as well, and the Libyan people would go out on the streets and demonstrate against the regime too, which the people –inspired by the events in Egypt and Tunisia, did. Social media gave the uprising a more organized character, and provided information for international organizations trying to relief the suffering brought about by the fighting between the government and the rebels. Also, it conveyed information on government targets to countries who wanted to change the Gaddafi regime, like Great-Britain, and France. The unfavorable international climate Gaddafi was operating in constrained his room for maneuver, and gave the rebels more room for maneuver, which they used to tear down the regime.

**Conjuncture and mass uprisings**

The Gaddafi regime had been stable for more than forty years. Why did the regime break down in 2011? Just as in the case of Egypt, and Tunisia we need to ask ourselves what had changed from before? Skocpol states that it is the political and economic contradictions on the state level that make a regime unable to deal with crises of the state and make it vulnerable for revolts from below. External pressures and a world-systemic opening constrain the regime’s room to maneuver and widen it for the opposition. In the case of Libya this also holds true.

The relation between the dominant elite and the state, and the dominant elite and producing class in Libya had caused these political and economic contradictions on the state level which made Gaddafi unable to deal with crises of the state. Gaddafi had closed a tacit social contract with the people where he was able to exert absolute power over the state in exchange for a decent standard of living much like the case of Tunisia. He co-opted the people with the use of Libya’s enormous oil revenues, providing free health care, education, food subsidies, state jobs, and housing to the people and furthermore gained legitimacy by employing anti-Western and Arab socialist rhetoric.

However, as the sanctions regime imposed by the West debilitated the Libyan oil exports, government revenues declined and Gaddafi was increasingly unable to uphold his end of the bargain. His response to these pressures was very strategic, as he decided to seek rapprochement to the West, and commence on a neoliberal course. This new economic course was accompanied by a change in the elite strata, as reformists were welcomed into the inner circle, headed by Gaddafi’s son Saif Al-Islam. The dominant elite had access to the economic opportunities the neo-liberal agenda yielded, and bought and sold state owned companies for a huge profit, and set up lucrative companies like airlines. The regime also enjoyed the spoils, creating an alliance between the new faction of the dominant elite, and the regime.

The effects of these policies on the lower classes were detrimental, however. The loss of job opportunities in the public sector, and cuts in subsidies, were not compensated by economic development, and opportunities in the private sector, as the regime and business elite were only concerned with
monopolizing opportunities for themselves and amassing wealth. Unemployment, and inflation percentages were rising, and combined with the loss in income brought on by cuts in subsidies and state jobs, lead to deteriorating economic circumstances for those not affiliated to the regime. It also caused a rift in the ranks of the elite, as the reforms unsettled the conservatist faction in the elite, who felt their interests were being threatened by the reformists faction. The fact that they had suspicions about Gaddafi grooming his son Saif Al-Islam to take over power, instead of choosing one of them to succeed him, worsened their fears.

Demographic developments and the 2008 economic downturn compounded the socioeconomic woes of the lower classes. Population growth in Libya, as in the entire Middle East and North Africa had been very high, causing a youth bubble whereby more than 50% of the population was between the ages of 15 and 24 at the time of the uprisings. These young people were overloading the educational system, and the labor market, which could not cope with all the new entrants. The economic downturn lead to higher food prices, worsening the economic woes of the lower classes.

In conclusion, these developments had broken the social contract between Gaddafi and the people. His legitimacy was waning too, as his anti-Western, and socialist rhetoric became implausible when he sought rapprochement to the West and implemented neo-liberal reforms. The blatant corruption and crony capitalism this stimulated, exacerbated this effect. In the meanwhile, the people of Libya had no means to voice their grievances besides by going out on the street, as the institutions Gaddafi had built for popular representation were void of real power, and there was no civil society.

The uprisings in Tunisia, and Egypt provided the trigger which made people go out onto the streets. Libyan dissidents living abroad inspired by the Tunisian, and Egyptian uprisings made use of social media to call upon all Libyans to protest the regime on 17 February 2011, the “Day of Rage.” In Benghazi, people had gathered around the local police station to protest the arrest of human rights lawyer Fathi Terbil (believed to be arrested preemptively by the regime) on 15 February 2011. The violent response of the regime escalated the situation and lead to widespread protests as a former diplomat conveys to the International Crisis Group: “Gaddafi’s guards started shooting people in the second day, and they shot two people only. We had on that day in Al-Baida city only 300 protesters. When they killed two people, we had more than 5,000 at their funeral, and when they killed fifteen people the next day, we had more than 50,000 the following day…. This means that the more Gaddafi kills people, the more people go out into the streets.”

Lacher describes two key developments that lead to the protests getting a more organized character, and agents being able to seize the temporary momentum in order to challenge the regime. In the first place, the violence the security forces employed lead to mass defections, and ordinary civilians, tribal leaders, politicians and military men organizing themselves against the state along regional, tribal, and familial lines, in order to protect themselves, and their city, tribe or family. Civilians set up armed brigades, and were strengthened by the military, who defected by the unit. Secondly, the National Transitional Council (NTC) was established in Benghazi in early March by exiled opposition members, like aristocratic, and bourgeois.
families driven abroad by the revolution in 1969, members of the academic elite, and regime defectors. Military councils were set up in an effort to coordinate the militias, of which the NTC soon lost control. However, as Lacher notes, as the rebels focused on fighting the Gaddafi regime on the ground, the NTC fought them in the international arena, in their efforts to obtain international recognition.\footnote{W. Lacher, ‘The Libyan Revolution and the Rise of Local Power Centres’, Mediterranean Politics, 2012, p.167; Institute for the Study of War, A. Bell and D.Witter, ‘The Libyan Revolution: Roots of Rebellion’, September 2011, \url{http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Libya_Part1_0.pdf}, consulted on 21 September 2014, p.26-27}

Within a week hundreds of people were reported dead, as the government used more and more violence to quell the protests. The enormous bloodshed, which is widely reported in the media and illustrated by footage taped by Libyan citizens and spread via social media, turned the international community against the Gaddafi regime, and provided the rebels with a world-systemic opening. The UNSC adopted resolution 1970 and 1973, giving NATO a mandate to protect civilians by “all necessary means.” France, the UK, and the US started bombing strategic goals to aid the rebels who are trying to push west. After the Berbers of the Nafsa Mountains (located west of Tripoli) join the uprising in July, their push west started to take a flight and it was not long before they reach Tripoli. Gaddafi was now confronted by a rebel front in the West, in the East, and by NATO air strikes. Also, the UN imposed naval blockade, arms embargo, and the fact that the rebels took a hold of the roads leading from Tripoli to Tunisia, leads his supplies to dry up quickly. On August 23 Tripoli was officially in rebel hands, and Gaddafi’s compound overrun and ransacked. Even though it was clear at that point that the rebels were going to win the fight, Gaddafi wanted to keep on fighting till the bitter end. However, several Gaddafi strongholds are taken over in the months leading up to October 20, and after the last one, Sirte, falls, Gaddafi is captured and dies of his injuries not long after.\footnote{NATO, ‘NATO and Libya’, 28 March 2012, \url{http://www.nato.int/cps/ar/natolive/topics_71652.htm}, consulted on 14 October 2014; United Nations Security Council, ‘UNSC Resolution 1970 (2011)’ and ‘UNSC Resolution 1973 (2011)’, \url{http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/}, consulted on 24 August 2013}
A comparative analysis

Theory tells us that political, and economic contradictions on the state-level lead to structural vulnerabilities that make a state vulnerable for broad-based cross-class uprisings from below when confronted with a crisis of the state, and a world-systemic opening. I have assessed the presence of these structural vulnerabilities by analyzing the extent to which Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia were suffering from a personalist, authoritarian, repressive regime, and dependent development. I have analyzed the extent to which external pressures on the regime were present by analyzing the influence of the rise of social media, the 2008 economic downturn, and the Jasmine and Nile revolutions on the revolutionary situations. Also, I have made an analysis of the international context these states were operating in in order to draw conclusions on to what extent a world-systemic opening was present. In this last section we will discuss the similarities and differences that can be found in our three case studies. Can we find a pattern of structural vulnerabilities leading to revolutionary situations?

In order to answer this question, I have drawn up a Boolean truth table indicating the presence, or absence of the variables investigated in the three case studies. The first table is a summary of the results as found in the case studies. The second table is the Boolean truth table. The capital letters indicate a presence of the factor at hand, the normal letters an absence. This presents us with a clear overview of the structural vulnerabilities leading to the revolutions in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt. It also presents us with an opportunity to test the validity of the theories on revolutions used to analyze our subjects.

As the Boolean truth table indicates, the following patterns lead to revolutions: ABC and AbC, or a personalist, authoritarian regime, combined with dependent development, and a world-systemic opening, and international pressures; and a personalist authoritarian state structure, combined with stable economic growth, and a world systemic opening and international pressures. This means that a personalist, authoritarian regime, and a world systemic opening, and international pressures are factors that need to be present in order for revolutions to come about. However, revolutionary situations come about whether or not the variable dependent development is present, which means it is not a necessary variable in the pattern leading to revolutionary situations.

However, if we take a closer look at the economic situation in Tunisia, and focus on the regional data instead of on the national data, this reveals that the Tunisian economy also had a lot of characteristics of an economy suffering from dependent development. Growth of GDP was stable, and inflation, and unemployment numbers too on a national level, but these were average numbers, driven up by high GDP numbers, and low inflation and unemployment percentages in the rich coastal areas. The hinterlands in Tunisia did suffer from high unemployment, high inflation, and poor quality health care and education systems, and other economic problems especially affecting the lower classes. On the national level characteristics such as dependence of the periphery on the center, and an alliance between the regime and the business elite, and the elite and the foreign elites could be witnessed. Thus dependent development was partially present.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>State structure</th>
<th>Economic structure</th>
<th>World systemic opening/ international pressures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>Personalist, authoritarian regime with traits of a military rule</td>
<td>Dependent development</td>
<td>-Economic downturn 2008</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Distracted United States</td>
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<td>-Social media</td>
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<td>-Jasmine Revolution</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>Personalist, authoritarian regime</td>
<td>Stable economic growth</td>
<td>-Economic downturn 2008</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Divided and paralyzed European Union/</td>
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<td>distracted US</td>
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<td>-Social media</td>
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<tr>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>Personalist, authoritarian regime</td>
<td>Rentier economy</td>
<td>-Economic downturn 2008</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>-Hostile international community</td>
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<td>-Social media</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Jasmine and Egyptian revolution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Also, in the case of Libya, dependent development might not have been present, but its rentier economy does have many traits of an economy suffering from dependent development: there was stable economic growth, paired with socioeconomic problems especially affecting the lower classes, like overburdened education systems, and high unemployment rates. Also, income inequality was growing, and the wealthy business elite was increasingly oriented towards the West, and isolating itself from the rest of the population.

This means that we have found the following pattern in comparing the political, and economic contradictions, and world-systemic openings and international pressures in the three case studies: a
personalist, authoritarian regime, coupled with dependent development or some other form of economic development excluding a large share of the population, and fostering inequality, and an economic downturn, the rise of new media, a favorable international climate for the protestors, and the effects of the Jasmine Revolution on the revolutions in Egypt, and Libya.

Since economic grievances were very much part of the reason people went out into the streets, dependent development should be replaced with another variable that encompasses the characteristics the Egyptian, Tunisian, and Libyan economy have in common that have lead to economic contradictions on the state-level. The most notable characteristics that come to the fore in the analyses above are the increasingly predatory behavior of the regime, and the rise of a Western-oriented super wealthy business elite with strong connections to the regime, paired with growing marginalization of the lower classes, as a consequence of high unemployment rates, overburdened socioeconomic infrastructure, and an overall lack of economic opportunities, as one has to have connections to the regime in order to get access to these opportunities.

These developments have started since neoliberal reforms were implemented by Ben Ali, Mubarak (and Sadat), and Gaddafi. It drove them to seek new groups that would support the regime, creating the business elite, and made it possible for the regime to appropriate a large share of the dividends the reforms yielded, in the form of buying and selling of state-owned companies, and providing licenses for lucrative businesses to people affiliated to the regime, and taking a cut of the dividends themselves.

I would like to call this new variable economic exclusivity: increasingly predatory behavior by the regime, coupled with the rise of a new business elite, growing income inequality between this elite and the lower classes, and adverse socioeconomic effects on the lower classes, as they are excluded from participating in the economy, set on by neoliberal reforms. It explains the arise of economic grievances better, because unlike dependent development, the level of economic growth, and unemployment and inflation rates are not decisive in ascertaining the presence of this variable. It focuses on the relation between the state, the dominant elite, and the lower classes. Also, it carries an element of injustice in it, in the sense that economic opportunities are monopolized by the regime and the business elite. As stated above: the regime’s legitimacy starts to decrease when the people see it as both unjust, and inefficient, which could be a compounding reason to go out into the streets.

Furthermore, as can be seen in the cases of Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya, this type of behavior is also unsettling to the old guard (the military elite in Egypt, the political elite in Tunisia, and the conservatist faction in Gaddafi’s inner circle) as they feel threatened by the new elite faction, and by the regime’s predatory behavior. This is important, as the regime’s support base is weakened by this growing suspicion by the old elite, and now has to fully lean on the new elite, even though it is oftentimes too late before the regime realizes this (as demonstrated by the false assumption by Ben Ali that the political elite would stage pro-regime protests, and by Mubarak that the army would shoot at the protestors).

It is no coincidence we have witnessed the development of revolutionary situations along these patterns in all three case studies, and the wave of revolutions in the Arab World in general since 2010. This has to do with the state structures laid down by Western powers as far back as in the Interbellum, described by Anderson, and Foran. As Foran states, these are oriented towards the needs of the Western, former
colonies, and not towards the needs of the societies in question. Maintaining stability is a key priority here, as Israel’s security, the steady stream of oil, and economic opportunities directly flow from this. Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya were all endowed with large welfare states, with huge administrative apparatuses, offering state jobs, food subsidies, and free health care, and education, the rationale behind which is that people would accept a lack of political freedom in exchange for a decent standard of living. After the shackles of imperialism, and neo-colonialism had been discarded through revolutions- Nasser, and the Free Officers deposed of the British-backed King Farouk in Egypt, Bourguiba successfully challenged the French protectorate in Tunisia, and the British-backed King Idris was deposed by Gaddafi and the Free Officers in Libya- the new leaders challenged the remnants of imperialism in their countries, but continued the huge welfare states, keeping the tacit social contract between the regime and the people in place. Political freedom was sacrificed for socioeconomic prosperity. Also, as part of their anti-imperialist strategy to increase legitimacy, Nasser, Bourguiba, and Gaddafi propagated Arab socialism, nationalizing private companies, which bolstered their popularity, and provided a growth of jobs in the public sector.

However, demographic developments, in the form of explosive population growth, and the failure of these Arab socialist policies to yield economic growth, made the welfare state too costly for Tunisia and Egypt, and soon Bourguiba en Nasser’s successors returned to the bosom of the West, and altered their economic, and foreign policy, in an effort to attract more investments, and donor aid. The success these strategic responses to pressures on the regime yielded them, allowed them to continue the social contract with the people. It did cost them legitimacy, however, as their anti-imperialist and Arab socialist rhetoric held no value anymore. Gaddafi, on the other hand, managed to carry on a lot longer with his unsuccessful economic strategies, as it could pay for it with the revenues from oil exports. As sanctions started to hamper the steady flow of oil revenues into Libya, he also took the neo-liberal route, and sought rapprochement to the West.

This combination of strong personalist authoritarian regimes coupled with neoliberal reforms caused contradictions on the state level in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. The state became intermeshed with the economy, whereby the fruits of the neo-liberal reforms ended up in the pockets of the regime and its cronies as we have explained above. In the meanwhile, demographic pressures in the Middle East, and North Africa were mounting. All three states were coping with explosive population growth, and a youth bubble at the time of the revolutions. Although this is not a direct cause of the revolution, it is a very important compounding factor which deepened economic problems. It was impossible for the regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, to deal with the increase in their populations, and people overflowing educational systems, and the job market. And because the regimes had become so intermeshed with the economy, and reliant on the business elite, it was unable to deal with these demographic pressures by implementing reforms.

The revolutions came as a shock to many academics, and other Middle East experts. This was because despite the developments described above the regimes had seemed very stable in the past decennia. However, this was on the surface, but the pressures made that the regimes were shaky underneath their hard exteriors. They had constrained its own room to maneuver and a crisis could prove to be insurmountable for the regimes.
This in turn had the potential to tear down the regimes completely, as the personalist, authoritarian regimes were dependent on the persona of the head of state to a great extent. In the case of Libya, Gaddafi had orchestrated the entire state structure around his persona. In the case of Egypt, Mubarak was equated with the regime, although the military played a more important role behind the curtains. In the case of Tunisia, the state revolved around the Ben Ali-Trabelsi clan. This created inherent weaknesses on the state level. In the first place, we have witnessed in all three cases that the head of state increasingly alienated the elite, and concentrated power in the office of the executive and amassed wealth for itself. The ultimate display of this unbridled amassing of power and wealth, and equating the state with the person ruling the state, is the fact that Gaddafi and Mubarak were grooming their sons to take over power after they had stepped down, which would have created a sort of sultanistic dynasty, as Linz puts it. This gave the people one single point to focus their grievances on. A more diversified political landscape would have acted as a diamond in the sunlight, or prism, scattering the light into all directions instead of focusing it on one point.

The question of succession, the increase in the concentration of power in the person which acted as head of state, and the fact that they now had to compete with the business elite, caused rifts, and dissatisfaction within the elite as well, weakening the regimes’ support bases. Especially the alienation of the army from the political process, in the case of Tunisia and Egypt, had proved to be crucial in the outcome of the revolutions, as their loyalties had shifted away from the regime, which made them unwilling to protect Mubarak, and Ben Ali. In the case of Libya, the army was kept weak and divided in order for it to not be able to challenge Gaddafi’s absolute rule. This also made the army unwilling and unable to protect him though. In Tunisia, furthermore, the political elite was increasingly isolated from the decision-making structures, and in Libya, the Free Officers, and the conservatist faction in the regime.

Secondly, an inherent weakness of authoritarian regimes is that they are undemocratic. The institutions for popular representation were void of real democratic power, and access to decision-making structures closed off to most of the population. This and the systematic cooptation and destruction of civil society made that people in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya did not have democratic channels through which they could voice their grievances vis-à-vis the regime. This meant that the regimes were unable to receive, and process feedback on their policies, and adjust them in order to maintain or restore legitimacy. People could only make their grievances heard through protesting in the streets. In short, the regimes were receiving feedback on their policies when it was already too late. When mass protests had commenced, the concessions Ben Ali, Gaddafi, and Mubarak tried to make in order to restore calm in the streets and retain their power, served to make them look weak, and only further angered the people, as they had completely lost their trust in the regime and thought the proposed reforms were too little, too late. It was also obvious by that point that the uprising had gained momentum, and that the protestors did not have to settle for reforms, but had a chance to depose of the entire regime.

Because of these political, and economic contradictions the state was not able to deal with crises of the state, which makes it vulnerable for revolts from below when external pressures arise. After the 2008 economic crisis socioeconomic pressures went past breaking point for the populations of Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, as reflected in the increase of the population living below the poverty line. The wave of revolutions
was triggered in Tunisia, but it might as well have been in Egypt, or Libya. The populations essentially had the same grievances. However, the region Mohammed Bouazizi is from, was hit particularly hard by the economic crisis. The Tunisian Revolution soon inspired protests in other Arab countries, amongst which Libya, and Egypt. Technological developments, namely a revolution in means of communication in the form of social media, gave the protestors a world-systemic opening, as it gave them the space to share ideas and make calls to action, but most importantly, because it allowed the whole world to watch what was happening inside these states, including citizens of Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt itself, as footage was posted on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube and disseminated via popular media outlets such as Al Jazeera. The violence used by the regime, visible on the footage, made the people sympathize with the protestors, and it hampered the international community from intervening on behalf of the regimes. In the case of Libya, the bloodiness of the revolution even made the international community intervene on behalf of the rebels.

As the regimes had no legitimacy amongst their people anymore, and reforms were no longer enough to quell the protests, and they were not supported by the international community, violent repression was the only option left to try and restore calm in the streets. However, the alienation of large parts of the population, and even the dominant elite, made that the protests were too wide-spread to be quelled by security forces. The army, in the case of Tunisia and Egypt refused to shoot at protestors, and in Libya it defected by the unit. This was the straw that broke the camel’s back in the three case studies, as the regimes now had no power anymore with what to back up their regimes. Ben Ali, and Mubarak stepped down, and Gaddafi, refusing to give up the fight, found his death as rebels ran over his compound.

In conclusion, it was the combination of a personalist, authoritarian regime, economic exclusivity, external pressures, and a world-systemic opening that made the revolutionary uprisings possible. Contradictions on the state level made the regimes vulnerable for revolts from below, external pressures weakened them, and the world-systemic opening empowered the protestors to seize the momentum and mobilize broad-based cross-class coalitions standing up for their rights, and challenging the regime. This pattern can be found in all three case studies, which can be explained by similar historical backgrounds, and the fact that they were affected by the same developments on the level of the international state system.
Conclusion

In this thesis I researched the following question: **To what extent can the revolutions in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya from 2010-2011 be explained by structural vulnerabilities on the state-level, like personalist authoritarian regimes, economic contradictions, and external pressures?** To that avail I have analyzed to what extent the following factors were present in the case studies: a personalist, authoritarian regime, dependent development, and a world-systemic opening and international pressures.

I have studied theories on revolutions and the Middle East in the theoretical framework. As can be read above, theories on revolutions are manifold, and there are many different approaches. Theorizing evolved from describing the process of revolutions in meticulous detail, to efforts to understand the general motives behind political upheaval, to structural approaches, to voluntarist approaches, and lastly the synthetic approach which combines elements of both. Theorizing on the Middle East has evolved from theorizing on modernization and democratization in the MENA, to theorizing on how the authoritarian regimes in the MENA managed to be so resilient. These theories I have reduced to the variables mentioned above, namely a personalist, authoritarian regime, dependent development, external pressures, and a world-systemic opening. These I have used to analyze to what extent structural vulnerabilities on the state-level can explain the revolutionary situations in the case studies. I have used the variables on authoritarian resilience, namely imitative institution-building, strategic responses to external pressures, cooptation, legitimation strategies, and elite change in order to explain throughout the case studies why these regimes managed to stay in power for so long, and also in what ways this authoritarian resilience broke down in the end.

I have compared the outcomes of these analyses in the previous chapter in order to allow us to draw careful conclusions on whether or not we can discover a pattern of structural causes leading to a revolutionary situation. Also, the case studies and the comparative analysis have allowed us to test the existing theories on revolutions on their applicability to the revolutions of the Arab Spring. Lastly, we can revisit existing theories on revolutions to see if they are still relevant today, or if and in what way they should be altered.

As can be seen in the comparative analysis above, the three factors we have measured the presence of in our case studies, do not form a pattern leading to revolutionary situations. In all three cases only the personalist, authoritarian regime was present, and a combination of other factors. In some cases international pressures were present, in other cases a world-systemic opening was. In the case of Egypt, dependent development was present, but in the case of Tunisia and Libya this factor was absent. That does not mean there is no pattern of structural causes leading to revolutions, but in any case it is not this one.

The factors we have used to test our cases have been distilled from existing theories on revolutions, notably Foran’s and Skocpol’s theories. This means that these theories are not sufficient to explain the recent developments in the Arab World. We should thus revisit the existing literature on revolutions, to see how we can adapt this to make it more applicable to the current state of affairs in the Arab World. It has to be noted that Skocpol’s theory was based on three cases that took place in different time periods. Also, the instances of revolutions she investigated took place in Russia, France, and China, or Europe, and (Eur-)Asia. Given the
differences between these regions and the Arab World, it should not disappoint the scholar that the scope of
the results of her research does not reach the Arab World. Foran has also focused his research on Third World
countries, but in the literature we have studied, the only Arabic country he has focused on is Algeria.

This provides us with an opportunity to do more extensive research on the particularities of
revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East. In the first place, we can compare instances of revolutions
in the Arab World to instances of revolutions in the areas mentioned above. Also, we can go back to basics
by using the Natural History approach to make a detailed description of the revolutions in the Arab World
from 2010-2011, which will allow us to distill the factors that are present in all the cases at hand. This in turn
we can use to adapt current literature on revolutions to make it applicable to the recent developments in the
Middle East and North Africa we have dubbed the Arab Spring.

As described above, for example, dependent development was not present in all case studies. Still,
the demands of the protesters made clear that structural economic factors were of influence in the coming
about of the revolutionary situations in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia. That means that this factor should be
replaced by another economic factor which has more explanatory value in these cases. I have suggested
economic exclusivity, a term I use to describe the exclusion of a growing share of the population from the
dividends economic growth yields the state. We can test this hypothesis against other cases, to see if it holds
up. Also, it provides us with an opportunity to do further research on the economic mechanisms of the
coming about of revolutions in general.

Although there does not seem to be a pattern of structural causes explaining the occurrence of the
revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, relevance of the outcome of this research is manifold. First of all, it
shows us that there is no such thing as an ‘Arab’ Spring. The differences in these countries’ political, and
economic structure, and the international environment they were operating in, have lead to a very different
process and outcome of the revolutions. To act as if this is not the case, is to neglect the differences between
them. This can be harmful for the development of policy on this matter. We should never forget every
country, and every case is unique.

Furthermore, the outcome of this research is a plight to strive towards more equal societies,
including a more equal world society. All three cases had in common that the gap between the rich and the
poor, the elite and the labour class, and the center and the periphery were growing. This is partially a
consequence of the neoliberal course Mubarak, and Ben Ali have chosen as a reaction to the failed etatist
policies of their predecessors (Gaddafi chose this road too towards the end of his rule). This is not a
phenomenon that can only be witnessed in the Arab World, it is a global trend. We have all witnessed the
harm the revolutions have done to the economy, infrastructure, and security of these countries, and also the
tragedy on a personal level that went hand in hand with it, via regular media, and social media such as
YouTube and Twitter. We should try to prevent such abrupt changes in the political, economic, and social
structure of states by realizing and acting upon the fact that neoliberalism is not the end of all history; it is
merely a transit point towards a more equal and just world if we choose it to be so.
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