

A study of recent uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa (2011-2012)

From an eco-political view point (the case study of Egypt)

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Abstract

Recent uprisings in the Middle East Started in Tunisia and expanded through other states. They led to the fall of the regimes in some states including Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya while the regimes in the others have been remained in place.

The uprising in Egypt was based on grounds including political, economic, cultural,... grounds among which the eco-political ground was the most important one. So the question one can ask, is what were the most important factors leading to the uprising in Egypt from an eco-political viewpoint? Answering the question as an hypothesis, it can be said that the clash between the dynamic young Egyptian society's demands and the rent eco-political structure accumulated dissatisfactions and the ultimate uprising in 2011-2012. Scrutinizing the social situation in the region, and describing rentier structures, this article analyses the nature of structures and its effect in creating recent uprisings in the Middle East. It uses a descriptive analytical method to discuss the variables.

Keywords: uprisings, rentier economy, dynamic society, social dissatisfaction

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Introduction

Factors leading to rent production the recent developments have been unique in the Middle East and the Arab world. The developments are going to witness a new history in the region. The region has been an exception in political literature because of the stability in its authoritarian tending to the west. However, the mottoes and slogans mentioned by the protesters determine that because of their 4 decades of economic depression and demobalization, the eco-political systems are unable to account for a young developing society. In addition, the regimes have joined a number of ties, and coalitions with the west, particularly the USA.

It is notable that the uprisings started in Tunisia; an ally of the west heading. Other states (2010). Whatever they are called such as "the Arabic spring", "the Islamic awakening", etc, they are considered a pack of unique uprisings, protests, and riots in Arab-dominated states in the Middle east, and north Africa including Tunisia, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. The uprisings led to the fall of the authoritarian regimes in Egypt, libya, and Tunisia, and arriving in the strategic part of the region, they turned Bahrain, and remen into a hot spot where the developments can break down the current equations, and lead into a new order.

Among the countries where the regimes fell, is Egypt (with Mobarak's regime at the time) where the uprising had various economic, political, and cultural aspects, but this article studies the uprising in the state from a eco-political view point. The time span of the discussion is 2011-2012.

1. Theoretical framework:

1.1 Rent, and rentier government

Rent is a political concept experiencing development since being introduced in the political literature. David Pears defines it in the "modern economy" dictionary as "the payment made in return to a production factor. It is more than the sum needed to keep its current use". Classic economist such as Adam Smith, and David Ricardo have focused on the concept of rent for a long time. According to Smith, it is a special kind of income resource which is different from other income resources including wage, and profit. It enters in price complex of goods in a

different way from wage, and profit so that a rise or fall in profit makes a rise or fall in a price while a high or low rent does not rise or drop a price; it is the result of a price (Haji Yousefi, 1997,P.152).

Ricardo-another classic economic theorist-considers rent the outcome of a land resource more than needed for using it. The reason of this outcome is the scarcity of fertile land so that an increasing demand for foods lead to an increasing cultivation i.e if food price increases so much that cultivating unfertile lands is also profitable, the owners of fertile lands will receive an extra profit as for their resources. In other words, rent is the prize made from natural resources. This wage is received without any try made by the producer and is against such concepts as wage, and profit (Mirtorabi, 9008, PP.4-5). Some suggest that rent was an ownership profit paid by a government to its people for the profit it makes from their lands.

1.2 Rental income resources:

According to the definition of rent, some governments are rentiers, or revenue collectors. According to a reliable index, a rentier government was a government obtaining 42% of its income from rental resources (Beblawi, Luciani, 1987, P.54). in the first waves of studies on rentier government, a rental resource was seen God's grace upon a small part of a society's workforce.

As mentioned above, natural resources were seen the most important rental resources. For example, the income from petroleum, and gass, or minerals including diamond is considered a kind of rent. These kinds of resources are centralized i.e the extra income from petroleum, gass, etc are totally gained by large oil companies, and central governments (firous Kalaei, 1394, P.50). That is why the Arab countries on the southern edge of the Middle East, and states such as Russia, Kazakhestan, Turkmenistan,... are considered rentiers. In many Arab countries, the export of oil, and gas includes 80% of their total export revenue. Even in such states as Syria, and Yemen where there is a limited oil, and gas source, fuel export includes a major part of their exports. According to the World Bank, fuels include 70% of both states exports. Later on, the concept of rent and its factor expanded. Today, natural resource is not the only factor of rent. In today's political literature, rent is considered an income higher than the minimum income of a person or estate gained in a market situation. This definition includes a large sum of incomes in the real world, because there is no fair competition.

In this regard, exclusive profits, subsidies, and transfers organized via political mechanisms, illegal transfers organized by mafia families, extremely short-term profits gained by innovators, etc. include rent. Therefore, some rents are legal, while others are illegal. Some such as exclusive rents may be signs of inaction, but others such as innovative rents i.e subsidies paid to new industries may be signs of efficacy and successful use of economic growth opportunities (Mirtorabi, 2014: 33-35).

Besides, aids granted by super powers to their allied states referred as "strategic rents" are also among rental resources. These aids including a remarkable sum of a receiving state's income, has an external source and is gained with no connection with its internal economy. Jordan is a good sample of receiving this kind of rent. Strategic rents have historically been received through the control of organized piracy in important transportation routes including canals. In addition, military coalitions, and the aids granted for them are a source of strategic rents.

Finally, monies transferred by workers residing in rich, and petroleum-exporting countries to their homelands are also a rental income. The significance of this kind of rent is that it has no relation with the internal economy of the country where it is gained (Firouzkalaie, 2015:51). The large sum of the rent gained through the monies transferred by workers implies that there is a sort of distribution cycle for the petroleum income in the region so that citizens of less productive states are hired in more productive states and have the petroleum incomes distributed in all the states in the region. Jordan, for instance, gained 13% of its gross income from this source in 2010 (Mirtourabi, 2008: 173-174).

In general, the triple study of rent suggests, strategic rent, the monies transferred by workers hired in foreign countries, and natural resources are the main income sources of rentier states. Since Egypt also makes profit of rent-seeking, the structure remaining from rentism influenced the result of the revolution in the state.

2. Developments in Egypt

With 80 million populations, 90% of which includes Moslems, Egypt is an important state in the Islamic world, the Middle East, and the African continent. It is a strategic country because of the Suez Canal, and the border line with the Red Sea, and the Mediterranean Sea (Hasheminasab, 2010:155). In addition, it is an agriculturally rich state (the Sarat, 2010:56). It gained independence from Britain in 1924. The

kingdom regime stayed in Egypt from 1924 to 1952 when it was overthrown by the free officer's coup, and replaced by the republic regime. Jamal Abdol naser reigned the state until 1971 when Anvar Sadat was elected president; he was in power until 1981. After his assassination, Hosni Mobarak tried to boost the army's role in economic improvement, and guarantee the internal stability. He managed to make personal profit of the Camp David Accord on the basis of the controversy of Iran-Iraq war among Arab states, and the occupation of Kuwait by Saddam. With his neutral policies, he tried to return Egypt to the Arab world gradually after being left alone because of the Camp David Accord (Abolhassan Shirazi, 2011:99).

1.2 The January 25 revolution in Egypt

Although starting in Tunisia, the new wave of the Islamic awakening, and the revolution in Egypt and the fall of Hosni Mobarak's regime boosted the self-confidence of the Arab revolutionaries in overthrowing dictators, and autocratic regimes. The revolution broke out while people's demands added fuel to the flames. In this regard, Dr.Hatam Mohammad introduces the following factors:

1. Deny freedom of speech, and use exorable power to repress opponents.
2. The security forces and police's misbehavior against citizens.
3. Corruption in the administrative system, and the disability of sensitive ministries such as the health, education, and economy ministries.
4. Mis-conduction in the previous elections, and the absence of the opponents in the parliament.
5. Deny the youth's needs and demands including employment and free activity versus the rising unemployment rate.
6. Absence of the opposition forces in the state's political environment (Eftekhari, 2012: 177-178). The first sparkles of protests in Egypt (January 15, 2011) were made in front of the Tunisian embassy with the purpose of supporting the Tunisian revolution (Barari, 2014:209). After 10 days, the April 6th Movement issued its first call for protest for which tens of thousands joined the people's protests. This went on as the protests were suppressed by the security forces and the government announced Islam-seekers responsible for the protests. The main protest (including millions of protesters) gradually broke up in At'tahrir. In Cairo joined by the Egyptian youths. As the unrests continued, Hosni Mobarak's administration declared curfew through the country. In the evening of the 1st of February (2011), announced on the state t.v channel

that people had the right to protest, but he was not going to resign. His speech fueled people's anger leading to the comprehensive protests in Cairo referred as "the Jamal even" in which the state's forces injured over 1500. In the day, he made a new speech and suspended the countries two parliaments. He also promised people to reform the constitution and reconsider the presidential elections time. This was while his speech was not accepted by the Muslim Brotherhood (i.e Islamic brothers). Finally, as the expansion of the protest and people's demands led to Mobarak's resignation, and the power was transferred to the army in 11 of February. Twodays later (in 13 of February), the army announced that it will be in the rein till the parliamentary, and presidential elections six months later, but the military state also confronted protests, because people believe the revolution had not gained its ultimate objectives and was going astray, so people gathered in at'tahrir square to emphasize on the revolution's objectives. The most important things people demanded from the military council were: lifting the curfew, reform the election law, enacting the law banishes the remains of the last regime, and setting the time table to transferring power from the military council to a non-military administration.

About 1 years after the outbreak of the revolution in Egyptian parliamentary election was held in November, December, and January (2012) to accelerate the transfer of power from the supreme council of the armed forces to the elected civil administration. The chairman of the elections committee announced that 70% participated in the election emphasizing that this broad participation has been exceptional since the beginning of Mobarak's selection. In the election, the coalition of Islam-trending forces including the Freedom and Justic Party, the Muslim Brotherhood political branch, the Salfi'annoor Party, and the Awsat Party won the highest number of votes and qualified to the parliament. So a new trend of Islamic wakening broke out and the islamists especially the Ikhwan'ol Moslemin have been the center of the process (Eftekhari, 2012:179-180).

After the brief description of the developments in Egypt, study of the bases of the revolution from an eco-political view follows.

3. The effect of different resources of rental incomes on the formation of the recent revolution in Egypt:

One feature of the Middle East states is the large sum of foreign rents in the rein of political economy and the variety of these kinds of rent. 3 kinds of foreign rents have been of the highest importance:

1. The rents from the natural resources especially oil, and gas.
2. Strategic rents.
3. Rents from the monies transferred by workers living in abroad.

3.1 Rent from exporting oil, and gas in Egypt:

Egypt became an oil-exporting country for the first time in 1976, and its oil production rose to 910 barrels per day in 1984. It arrived at 910000 barrels per day in 1993, but has been constantly decreasing ever since (Fattouh, 2008:11-12).

Egypt's oil and oil material production increased to 700/000 barrels per day, and the natural gas production was estimated 27 billion square meters in 2005. Most coastal lines of the country have natural gas in them and the fossil fuel portion was on a fast increase in 2004. Since its first liquid Natural Gas (LNG) terminal started in 2004 with the first ship carrying LNG in January 2005, Egypt has been an LNG exporting country (eia, 2012:6).

The above discussion suggests that with its low oil and gas income and larg population (about 80millions), Egypt is not among such high oil-income countries as Libya, and its oil and gas productions have no role to play in supporting autocracy, and suppression, and the formation of the recent uprisings. It is, however, a rentier state, because a part of its income is from exporting oil and gas.

3.2 Strategic rent in Egypt

Egypt's two strategic rents i.e the Suez Canal, and the USA's foreign aids are described here.

- The Suez Canal:

This canal has historically been highly important. After assuming the reins of power in January 26 (1956), Naser nationalized the canal when half of the oil produced in the Middle East was exported across it (Rafie,2007:96).

Nationalizing the suez canal belittled Britain so that it turned from the highest creditor to the highest creditor to the highest debtor. Britain's oil profits in the Middle East was an important factor in its foreign incomes, and its loss was a disaster (Mirtorabi, 1391:129).

Approximately 2/3 of Egypt's incomes includes foreign rents i.e oil and gas productions, foreign aids, and the incomes from the Suez Canal. The Canal's transit income was 4.8 billion dollars in 2010 (ibid:170).

- The USA's aids to Egypt:

In the last 3 decades, Egypt received on the average, 2 billion dollars as aids from the USA (wan & Londono, February 04, 2012). The USA paid 71 billion dollars to Egypt as bilateral economic-military aids in 1948-2011, this sum rose to 1 billion and 300 million dollars in 1987 (Sharp, 2013:17). The aids were decreased to 455 million dollars, and 200 million dollars in 2007, and 2009, respectively.

Contrary to the USA's claim, the aids were not made to boost the Egyptian army, but, in fact, to guarantee Israel's security. The aids actually were allocated to boost the internal security of Mubarak's regime, and empower it against the people's movements.

These strategies reduced the popularity of the US international development agency for the Egyptian people, and elites. The USA's indisputable aids to Israel, and Washington's defeat in coming to a comprehensive political agreement to ensure Israel's security on the border assigned in 1977 raised doubts about the American aids, and shed light on the USA's partiality to Israel against Arab states.

Finally, the USA's aids made a lot of political, strategic, and sometimes economic profits for Egypt. The statistics of the US-Egypt's business relation (2011) are presented here.

- Exports:

The USA's exports to Egypt were 6.2 billion dollars in 2011, 95% (625 million dollars) less than those in 2010. Most exported items included grains (wheat, and corn: 1.5 billion dollars), minerals, fuels, and oil (598 million dollars), machinery (571 million dollars), planes (470 million dollars), and iron and steel (414 million dollars). The US agricultural exports to Egypt were 2.5 billion dollars making Egypt the largest market for the USA in which wheat (808 million dollars) was the most important product.

- Imports:

The USA's imports from Egypt were 2.1 billion dollars in 2011 with a 132% decrease in 2000 which shrank to 180 million dollars. The topmost imports from Egypt (2011) were: woven cloths (503 million dollars), minerals and oil (356 million dollars), and fertilizers (264 million dollars). The imports were totally worth 93 million dollars in

2011 (office of the US trade representative, 2011). Moreover, besides Israel, Egypt was the biggest receiver of financial and military aids from the USA from 1979 up to the fall of Mobarak's regime (Nerguizian,2011:12).

We come to the conclusion that strategic rent plays an important role in Egypt's economy and the USA has provided aids to the country to keep Israel safe and help Mobarak's regime to suppress the people's movements leading to the final weakness and fall of the regime (2011).

3.3 The rent from the monies transferred by immigrant workers in Egypt

Egypt is a pioneer country in exporting workforce in the world. A collection of Egyptian immigrants with all expertise are working around the world. In the middle East, Egyptian immigrate to petroleum-producing countries especially Libya, and less to Lebanon, and Joran, and out of the Middle East, to the USA, Europe, Canada, Australia, and Japan. Their stay in the petroleum-producing countries always encounters problems because of the permanet immigration law in those countries, so they are bound to immigrate to Australia, European countries, and the USA. However, because of the job competitions in these countries, those with high expertise manage to get the Visa. Those who immigrate to the middle east countries are less expert with the purpose of saving money and returning to Egypt (El-sakka,2010).

The sum of money transferred by immigrants increased from 3.21 billion dollars in 195 to 9 billion dollars in 2008 (UN, 2010:11). Though a personal flow, the money each immigrant transfers, is somehow affected by eco-political factors. For example, the high sums of money in 1992-1993 (6.1, and 5.66 billion dollars, respectively) were the quick reflection of the Post-Gulf Persian war period when the middle east countries decided to hire Egyptians rather than Jordaneans, the Sundanese, Palestinians, and Yemenis. In the 1985-2009 period, the sums of money transferred were 4.22 billion dollars on the average.

Egypt's dependence on the rent incomes from the sums of money transferred by the workforce in abroad suggests that this kind of rent has an important role to play in Egypt's income sources; it decreases the state's need to receive taxes and its accountability to the nation leading to people's dissatisfaction, and the final uprising and revolution.

Generally, the rent systems disussed above led to the formation of a rentier eco-political system with its special consequences i.e poverty,

economic inflation, unemployment, and an autocratic regime. Besides the rent systems, the population growth worsened the economic problems. The economic problems caused by the rent systems in Egypt are discussed here.

4. Population dynamics, unemployment, and the rentier system in Egypt

Economic situation and political short-coming have to be considered when discussing the expansion of protests in Egypt. Unemployment of 95% of the population mostly youths, and lack of a promising perspective was an important factor in provoking the youths uprising against Mubarak's regime. The high percentage of unemployment and the terrible economic situation versus luxurious life of the authorities and the dominant elites suggest two different pictures between which were corruption and disability of the dominant elites (Ahmadian,1390).

4-1 Population growth

Egypt has witnessed a considerable population growth in recent decades, the population increased from 35.3 millions in 1970 to almost 57 millions in 2008 i.e it doubled in less than 40 years.

The global population growth rate decreased from 2.6% in 1960 to 2% in 2005, but the population in Egypt is still on the rise with 3 children for every woman on the average. The population is very young; more than half of it (57.2%) includes people below 25, and 37.3% of it includes those younger than 15, so 33.5% of its total population is 1.-25 years old (unfpa).

The following table shows the annual population growth in Egypt (1995-2005) suggesting that there was an almost 53 million increase from 1995 to 2005.

The annual population growth in Egypt per millions (1955-2005)

1955	834/21
1960	692/24
1965	840/27
1970	563/31
1975	313/39
1980	915/43
1985	668/49
1990	768/55
1995	638/61
2000	784/67
2005	878/74
source:unfpa	

The population is still on the rise (1.5 millions per year) i.e the annual population in Egypt equals the total population in Koweit. The UN's estimation suggests that it is on the rise (ibid).

Population growth has imposed major problems on Egypt which prevent economic growth, increase health dangers for children, and woman, decrease the standard of life, and access to education, food, Jobs, and rare sources including fresh water (Khalifa, Davanzo, and Adamson, 2000).

The youth are the biggest property for Egypt besides covering the largest part of the population. On the basis of statistics in 2006, 40% of the population is 10-20 years of age. The large number suggests a positive point for the country's future, this is while Egyptian youngster need economic support when they arrive at the working age. The high number in this part, however, pressurizes social services, and the job market leading to a major challenge for development plans and turning the advantage of the young population into a population load (unfpa).

4.2 Unemployment

Unemployment has been a major problem in Egypt for decades, it has remarkably increased since 1960s. In 1960, less than 200,000 were unemployed, the number increased to 850,000 in 1976 and it increased to more than 2 million in 1986 (Economy watch, 2010). The unemployment rate was 10% in 2000 increasing to 11% in 2005, with a little decrease, the rate was 9% in 2010 (dat, un, 2013).

The population growth has been a challenge rather than an opportunity. While there is an extra workforce in some villages, there is a lack of workforce in others. Egyptian youngsters seriously encounter unemployment, university graduates have to wait at least 5 years before they are hired by the government, so the unemployment rate is high among them.

Unemployment inflicted Egypt with serious physical and mental effects. The youth, however, demanded more political freedom, fighting corruption, and providing improved standards of living leading to the fall of Mubarak's regime in 2011. The country encounters a lot of challenges in the post-Mubarak era in creating an economic stability (Economy watch, 2010).

4.3 Poverty

In 1991, almost 1/4 of the Egyptian population (24.3%) was below poverty line. The rate is considered 1/5 of the population now. The following table represents the increasing poverty percentage from 1991 to 2008.

The population rate below poverty line in Egypt (1991-2008)

1991	3/24
1996	9/22
2000	7/16
2005	7/19
2008	20

Source : unfpa

This is while the wealthy class covers only a small part of the population with a close relation with the authorities and Mobarak's family (Maghsoudi, Heidari,1390:60).

4-4 Intlation

Egypt encountered the highest inflation (16.2%) in 2009 (Rady, Abdel Moneim, 2011). The following table represents inflation, and economic growth rates.

The inflation, and economic growth rates in Egypt (1981-2010)		
inflation rates	growth rates	year
1/9%	3/2%-	1981
3/8%	5/6%	1982
4/15%	1/3%	1983
7/6%	6/2%	1984
3/6%	6/6%	1985
9/5%	9/1%	1986
3/33%	0/5%	1987
7/16%	4/0%	1988
4/21%	4/0%	1989
5/23%	2/33%-	1990
9/11%	9/55%-	1991
5/25%	2/31%-	1992
5/8%	8/4%	1993
8/7%	2%·/	1994
6/11%	7/1%	1995
5/6%	2/3%	1996
1/6%	6/3%	1997
6/4%	6/4%	1998
1/1%	7/2%	1999
3/4%	5/3%	2000
1/2%	8/7%-	2001
0/2%	8/11%-	2002
0/1%	7/9%-	2003
8/17%	3/19%-	2004
7/6%	6/4%	2005
1/7%	6/9%	2006
5/12%	5/4%	2007
4/12%	5/8%	2008
5/10%	7/2%	2009
0/10%	3/2%	2010
6/10%	9/2%-	Average

Source : p.grammy , 2011 : 2

It is generally concluded that increasing unemployment, inflation, poverty, and etc drastically increased dissatisfaction in Egypt, and Mubarak's regime disability to solve them led to its fall.

Conclusion

This article discusses eco-political factors raising unrest in Egypt. Complicated events including the rise of social movements and revolution in Egypt were surely affected by factors rooted in rentier economic and political structures.

This study was, however, conducted on the basis of the new strategy in studies on oil, and politics covering all-internal, external, regional, and trans-regional- aspects. It also glanced at rentier incomes with political and social variables in the region. This kind of glance avoids simplistic look at the factors of people's uprisings in Egypt, and clarify the differences of the destiny of the states experiencing the events.

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