

Between Regime Change and Revolutionary Change: The Necessity for a Revolutionary Theory in the Maghreb Uprisings

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Abstract

Five years after popular uprisings in the Maghreb which swept some despotic regimes in the region out of power and replaced them with anarchy and uncertainties, the necessity for a revolutionary theory for revolutionary activity has become inevitable. A theory of revolution would not only provide a road map for people's action, it would also point to the necessary ingredients for a successful revolution which were lacking in the Maghreb uprisings. An appraisal of the Maghreb five years after the pro-democracy uprisings shows clearly that the revolutionary momentum which those uprisings assumed were cornered, hijacked or frustrated. The obvious result as shown, is regime change which fell short of releasing the productive energies of the social forces in the movements. The proposition for a revolutionary theory for a revolutionary movement is underscored by the undeniable facts that a successful revolution is not one that gains power but that which fundamentally replaces obsolete relations of production with a new socio-economic formation capable of translating aspirations and dreams to happiness.

Keywords

Revolutionary Theory, Social Forces, Maghreb Uprisings, Despotic Regimes, Anarchy, Uncertainties

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1. Introduction

After a long interregnum following the Second World War (1939-1945), and the bipolar world system, the Maghreb attracted world attention again between 2010 and now. Allied forces had exploited the region during the Second World War for bases and defences against the axis powers. After the war, the region polarized into two rival blocs as a reflection of cold war diplomatic posturing by Superpowers; Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt were diplomatically inclined to the West, while Libya, was the arrow head of Soviet Union in the region. By 2010, the Maghreb, inter-alia, was characterized by political repression, social maladies and economic discomfiture, all orchestrated by autocrats of the region who hitherto enjoyed longevity in tenures, legitimacy

and cordiality of superpowers who shored them up while turning a blind eye to their excesses, thereby trading freedom for stability (Enor, 2012).

In December, 2010, the region was swept by a wind of change starting from Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, spreading to the Middle East. This paper is limited to the Maghreb where an admixture of social forces found expression to act together by the common agenda to supplant their autocrats with democratic representations in their affairs. From Tunisia, Libya and Egypt (which technically and historically is not a Maghreb State), the cry was against authoritarianism, human rights violations, unemployment, misery, Western imperialism, inflation, Kleptocracy and so on. The only solution to these woes from the point of the protesters was to bring down the regimes as they expressed in Arabic "As-sha

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Yurld Isqatannizan". If their intentions have been to replace their autocrats with Islamic regimes, the West would not fold its arms while protesters install regimes that may not be pliable to Western interest as the events in Egypt unfolded after the installation of Muhammed Morsi. By their efforts and outside collaboration (as in the case of Libya), those repressive regimes were brought down.

Five years after, the Maghreb scenario can only be described as frying pan to fire, as they pathetically yearn for a return to the pre-revolutionary era. One cannot help but allude to the Biblical Israelites who queried Moses to return them to Egypt where they could be buried when they died than to die in the wilderness where graves were non-existent. As the Maghreb wobbled in their democratic experiments, several questions confront the imagination.

- i. What are the reactions and or responses of the West to this seemingly intractable political logjam in the Maghreb?
- ii. What may have happened to the prodemocracy uprisings in the Maghreb which assumed revolutionary proportion? where they hijacked, cornered, frustrated or betrayed?
- iii. What is the way forward for the Maghreb states of North Africa?

It will be recalled that at the wake of Arab spring, the US president Barrack Obama (2011) justified intervention on the basis that "when Qaddafi inevitably leaves or is forced from power, decades of provocation will come to an end, and transition to a democratic Libya can proceed". Eventually, intervention was short-lived and succeeded only in ousting Qaddafi and creating a vacuum which is filled with militant groups with no capable leadership that could institute structures that can bring about a democratic Libya.

As we contemplate these issues, permit us to state that Maghreb uprisings as stated elsewhere (Enor, 2013) were not revolutions after all, they assumed revolutionary intensity but lacked the ingredients that could bring about structural changes that should translate these societies to the dream of their precursors. It is for this reason that an evaluation of the events in the Maghreb five years after, recommends a road map for a peoples' transition as dictated by specific circumstances in the region. Major elements lacking in the uprisings have been identified. The paper has therefore attempted to discuss on theory as guide to revolutionary activity. The paper has been divided into three subheads beside the introduction and conclusion.

The first sub-head attempts a brief overview of Tunisia, Libya and Egypt as currently examined; the second sub-head provides the theoretical bases for what was lacking in the

Maghreb uprising and the last subhead is the position taken by the paper.

2. Tunisia

Until the events of December 2010, which culminated into the resignation of Ben Ali, as president of Tunisia, General Zine Abidine Ben Ali had since 1978 replaced the aged Bougiba in a bloodless coup to become Tunisia's president, enjoying the active support of France and the US. He lasted for 23 years in office within which period, he earned a very poor human rights records, while also witnessing the rise of Islamic fundamentalist groups, a growing anti-western sentiments, high food prices compounded by high unemployment, and political repression. These objective conditions fermented the revolutionary situation which received a boost when Bouazizi immolated himself. Ben Ali resigned from office and fled to Saudi Arabia. A quick transition coalition was contrived to midwife a democratic process. The outcome was a constituent assembly of 217 members. The new constitution provided for increase human rights, gender equality, and a decentralized and more transparent government.

By October, 2014, Tunisia held its first parliamentary election and presidential election subsequently on November, 2014. The fire brigade approach by which these democratic structures were erected to say the least, partly explains why reactionary forces are exploiting the contraption for their selfish purposes. Indeed a genuine democratic culture cannot take root overnight by parliamentary decrees and decisions without ideological orientation of the people to the cause. It is little wonder therefore, that, almost five years aftermath, 35% of Tunisians regret the downfall of Ben Ali. Tunisia currently suffers from a growing Islamic militancy that has links with al-Qaeda, political divisions between secularist and Islamist, economic downturns with a falling GDP, soaring unemployment, budget deficit, inter alia. Tunisia like its neighbours has presented yet another revolutionary situation.

3. Libya

Perhaps the case of Libya is worse off as a result of NATO intervention in 2011 at the instance of the United Nations. Intervention bifurcated Libya paving way for the emergence of Islamic militant groups. Between 2011 and 2015, Libya has paraded not less than seven Prime Ministers with two competing parliaments, each with its Prime Minister and army. Paul and Parsons (2014), noted the existence of not less than 125 rival arm groups including Ansa al-sharia, an al-Qaeda affiliate group armed by intervention forces against

Qaddafi during NATO campaign. Libya, as noted by the duo, “has become North Africa’s most active militant sanctuary” a lawless land where drugs and illegal arms have become common place. Tuareg rebels in Northern Mali and the Boko Haram insurgents in north eastern Nigeria are both benefitting from the arms bonanza from Libya. The human rights situation in Libya noted Kuperman (2014), has grown from bad to worse since NATO intervention. Gender inequality, rape, abductions, assassination and assassination attempts are all common place in Libya after Qaddafi. The oil economy now suffers from low production as a result of the depredation and chaos. Kuperman’s estimate put the number of Libyans who have deserted their homes at 400 thousand.

Humanitarian intervention in Libya succeeded in regime change while destabilizing a whole nation state. The path toward democracy and stability as orchestrated by Barack Obama remains a far cry for Libyans who now lament the exit of their former dictator, and wished the United States spent more time to rebuild or restructure the mess which they contributed to bring about. As the international community under the auspices of the UN pay deaf ears or do little to restore the once prosperous African nation state, onlookers are tempted to question the motive of NATO’s intervention in Libya. It is recalled that NATO forces exceeded its mandate in Libya which as it appears now, did not have the interest of Libyans at heart. Opinions weigh high that the Arab spring presented the opportunities for the West to get rid of Qaddafi and this task was more appealing than any other concern by NATO. Obama (2011) asserted;

..... When Qaddafi inevitably leaves or forced from power decades of provocation will come to an end, and the transition to a democratic Libya can proceed.

Until lately when he evolved into an ally with the West against al-Qaeda which threatened his state, Qaddafi had not enjoyed a cordial relationship with the West since assumption of office in 1969. With a domestic policy that favoured local labour and capital, Qaddafi maintained an anti-imperial posture which put him at odds with the West. Suspicion, distrust and accusation featured prominently in Qaddafi-West Relations. The West suspected Qaddafi of financing terrorism and political subversion. Reagan’s administration terrorized Libyans with the intent to oust Qaddafi. The administration organized trade laws that could have amounted to embargo against Libya. The unnecessary aggression on the Libyan state by the United States could not resolve or put an end to terrorist activities; rather, Libya attracted the sympathy of weaker states and increased Qaddafi’s resolve to pursue his controversial policies with the West. The Arab spring was a welcome opportunity for the West to perfect their preconceived agenda of exterminating a

leader determined to pursue a nationalist policy backed by large sums of money set aside to assist African states unyoke Western imperialism. Ironically, the West still enjoys the friendship and cordiality of regional allies and autocratic monarchs with worse human rights records like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirate. As intervention forces did not stay on to institute durable institutions that could bring about stability in place of anarchy and chaos, only time will vindicate the imagination of onlookers.

4. Egypt

Like Tunisia and Libya before it, the political scenario in Egypt is not remarkably different. The prodemocracy uprising of 2011, replaced Hosni Mubarak with the military taking over to institute a transition to democratic rule. In the June 2012 election, Mohammed Morsi of the Muslim brotherhood worn and was sworn in. As could be expected, a Muslim brotherhood on the saddle did not go down well with the many forces and interest groups both internal and external that had a stake in Egypt. Compounded by rising expectations which did not receive quick attention, a coup replaced Morsi with yet an ex-military general. Even so, the transition from a military, to a military has not resolved the contradictions which in the first place galvanized the social forces in Egypt into revolutionary activity.

Escalating debts, rising unemployment, depleting foreign exchange reserve, imbalances in the distribution of power and wealth has combined to threaten the socio-economic and political stability of the Egyptian state. (Abdou and Zaazou: 2013). The Egyptian state is polarized into factions comprising the army, keen on protecting its economic and security interest, the liberals ever yawning for change and the Islamist “protecting their conservative views” (Roza et al, 2012). Egypt like its aforementioned neighbours is still far from appropriating the dreams of the uprising five years aftermath. The Arab spring succeeded in regime change and failed in translating change to progress. As democratic institutions cannot be built overnight by a fire brigade approach, and no enduring institutions capable of aggregating the different factions and forces together in the act of nation building, Islamic militant groups have seized the vacuum and menacing the entire region.

The situation in the Maghreb affirms our earlier position that there exist a fundamental difference between regime change and revolutionary change. When a potpourri of secular, prodemocracy activist, Islamist, labour unions, political parties civil society groups and ordinary citizens with different agendas, all hungry for change, aggregate as during the Arab spring, the outcome may not be revolutionary after-all. The socio-economic and political contours of the

Maghreb actually presented the revolutionary situation (maturation of social contradictions have taken shape) five years ago as indeed now, but lacked the ingredients for a successful outcome. A revolution should not only seize power, it should also be able to upturn obsolete production relations with new forms of relations which alone can usher in structural change that liberate the masses from the forces of misery and poverty. Objective conditions must coincide with subjective factors which consist of ideological orientation of the masses, a vanguard political party amidst other factors for a revolution to be successful. To these matters we turn in the subsequent subhead.

5. The Theoretical Basis for a Peoples' Revolution: The Necessity for a Revolutionary Theory in the Maghreb Uprisings

Bourgeois scholars and right wing socialist, view revolutions as sheer destruction, a negative phenomenon and obstacle to the progress of society. They contend that revolutions are violent and brought about not by objective conditions but by subjective factors. They do not only question the leading role of the Marxist-Leninist parties, they also reject the necessity of a revolutionary theory for a revolutionary movement. Their views are not only distracting and misleading, bourgeois theorizing do not deepen understanding of the dynamism of society's transition from one socio-economic formation to another. To the above views, the teachings of V.I Lenin and Amilcar Cabral would form the bases of this subtitle and also serve to appeal to the necessity for revolutionary transformation of society to be guided by a road map if the revolution must be successful; for as asserted by Cabral (1966), "... if it is true that a revolution can fail even though it be based on perfectly conceived theories, nobody has yet made a successful revolution without a revolutionary theory".

A successful revolution opines Tenter and Midlarsky, occurs when, as a result of the challenge to the status quo, insurgents are eventually able to occupy principal roles within the structure of the political authority. Robert Weir (1978), is even more succinct when he asserted that:

Regardless of other ramifications it may have in the social system, revolutionary change invariably brings about... a reconstruction of the political order through a forcible location of political power ... and a reordering of political authority.

To the above we may add that relocation of political power

must be accompanied by a popular agenda for social transformation of society. History has shown that most revolutions failed because they lacked a social agenda to bring about change. A revolution is complete and successful when the new ruler who has displaced the old relations of production can be equated with revolutionary transformation of the society. The socio economic and psychological well-being of man has to experience changes. Revolutions are not merely regime change. When a revolution occurs in any society something about the life of the ordinary citizens in the society, their living standard should change. Jeff Godwin (2001) noted that:

Revolutions entail not only mass mobilization and regime change, but also more or less rapid and fundamental social, economic and cultural change, during or soon after the struggle for state power.

It is for the above expositions that Maghreb uprisings may not be regarded as revolutions after-all; put differently; these uprisings which assumed revolutionary momentum were either cornered or hijacked by reactionary forces or petty bourgeoisie to serve their interests. Seen from this perspective therefore, the necessity for a revolutionary theory cannot be over flocked especially now that the Maghreb is re-enacting the revolutionary situation all over. The ancient mariner had admonished that it is never too late to seek a newer world. This section will attempt some conceptual clarifications of the subject matter of revolution, and highlight ingredients considered necessary for a successful revolution as exposed by two notable revolutionist and theoreticians of revolutions Lenin and Cabral.

On what is a revolution Robert Weir (1978) noted:

Of course the question may, like the question of truth, be unanswerable because of its complexity. It is certainly possible that were an interdisciplinary group of authorities in the subject of revolution to be sequestered in a room until they could agree on what counts as revolution they might never see their families again.

What Weir meant is that definitions of revolutions are as many as the theoreticians each reflecting the bias of his discipline. For the purpose of this paper, we shall limit definition to Lenin and Cabral's postulations on revolution. Though Cabral did not belabour himself with definition of concept, he however considered the African revolution to entail "the transformation of our present life in the direction of progress" By implication; revolution in Africa entails a radical disengagement of all obstacles to progress and development. In the "Weapon of Theory", Cabral (1966), stated:

... Violent transformations carried out within the process of development of classes, as a result of mutations in the

level of productive forces or in the pattern of ownership, are generally called, in economic and political language, revolutions.

He opines that “revolutionists must not fight for ideas but for material benefits, improved conditions and a better future for children”. On a successful revolution Cabral maintains that the struggle must continue on three levels: political action, armed action, and national reconstruction (Blackey; 1974). Furthermore, Cabral decried a fundamental weakness, on a general note, in the struggle which he referred to as “the struggle against our own weakness”. “This battle is the expression of the internal contradictions in the economic, social, cultural (and therefore historical) reality of each of our countries“. And he was convinced “that any national or social revolution which is not based on knowledge of this fundamental reality runs grave risk of being condemned to fail (Cabral, 1966). Ideological deficiency which Cabral decried as one of “our” weaknesses featured in the Maghreb uprisings. Defined as “a system of ideas, providing the formal structure of human action aimed at some defined interest”, Wilmot (1980), ideology must be effective and it must triumph over competing ideologies. Ideology remains by and large a prime mover and direction of action. A movement or policy that is not guided by an ideology wavers. People are usually committed to an ideology. If the Maghreb uprisings were guided by an ideology which oriented the masses, those uprisings may not have been cornered as it were. The development of a revolutionary situation therefore, is usually apposed, cornered or clot by reactionary forces who go all out to protect and strengthen their positions; this has to be guided against.

The Maghreb uprisings also lacked a vanguard political party. The task of the party must be to educate the masses, “train and organize forces to follow up the political ground work”, and lead the masses in a fight against the old order and also minimize conflict among the various groups. The peasant can only be a revolutionary force when it is educated with the aims of the revolution and properly mobilized. The introduction of a vanguard political party into revolutionary movement is perhaps one of the most remarkable departures of Lenin from Karl Marx. Lenin’s emphasis on the centrality of a vanguard party in the process of revolution is predicated on his argument that the working class cannot be trusted in ushering in the revolution. Lenin argues that trusting the working class will be a tactical error because left to them that class will not progress to revolutionary class consciousness that will incite revolution. *In What is to be Done*, Lenin argues that the working class need to be led to revolutionary class consciousness by a vanguard political party, a group of dedicated revolutionaries who are able to discern the opportunity for revolutionary activity even in the absence of

a concerted revolutionary movement among the working class. The working class according to Lenin only develops “trade union consciousness”, a consciousness that will promote their immediate economic well-being. The presence of the vanguard political party will push the working class to articulate political claims that will transcend the narrow economic concern of that class into the revisionary activity of a revolutionary class. To Lenin, revolution is not a spontaneous uprising but a carefully planned political event by professional revolutionaries. The working class does make revolution only after the ruling class has become decadent, corrupt and incapable of ruling. He defined revolution as

The passing of state power from one class to another is the first, the main, the basic principle of revolution, both in the strictly scientific and in the practical political meaning of the term (in Kimmel, 1990).

Lenin’s theory of revolution reiterated the need to destroy the state machinery in the event of revolutionary seizure of power.

Another very crucial element needed by Maghreb uprisings was leadership. Leadership in a revolutionary movement has been better summarized by Hopper (1950), as follows:

A revolutionary movement needs the iron will, daring vision of an exceptional leader to concert and mobilize existing attitudes and impulses into a collective drive of a mass movement ... (in Kimmel, 1990).

Hopper argues that followers must have somebody to follow. The leadership of a revolutionary movement must be focused with a well-articulated social programme for the people. Leadership determines techniques or approaches. This is absolutely important as most people associate revolutions with sheer destruction and bloody encounters. The revolutionary situation determines the technique which can be violent or nonviolent. Non-violence therefore is a technique or tactic of revolution which should not be confused with a theory of revolution. Leadership, followership, ideology and foreign presence are very crucial factors that make or mire a revolution.

In order of the forgoing therefore, it is pertinent to state that the maturation of a revolutionary process is a spontaneous, but a revolutionary situation alone is insufficient to bring about a triumphant revolution. For a revolution to take place, the objective conditions must coincide with subjective factors which consist of able leadership, ideological orientation of the masses and a vanguard political party to drive the process. The coincidence of objective conditions and subjective factors are a very complex process it should be noted; enemies of the movement like reactionary forces may seek to clot up the process by all available means at their

disposal. To overcome this, leadership should strive to close the gap between the masses and the vanguard. In the case of the Maghreb, the traditional bourgeoisie who seem to hold power amidst these uncertainties should commit class suicide and be reborn into the revolutionary class for a successful execution of the revolution.

6. Conclusion

This paper attempted an appraisal of the current political scenario in the Maghreb states of Tunisia, Libya and Egypt five years after the prodemocracy uprisings which for want of a better description were termed as revolutions. The examination shows clearly that five years after, the Maghreb is a far cry from the aspiration of the protesters. Maghreb uprisings only succeeded in regime change while falling short of revolutionary changes. The paper makes a distinction between the two phrases and identifies the missing ingredients which should have converted Maghreb uprisings to successful revolutions. As uncertainties loom high in these states at the time of this paper, a revolutionary theory to serve as a road map to a successful revolution was recommended based on time tested prescriptions by revolutionist and theoreticians of revolutions alike. Conscious that national revolutions are not exportable commodities as asserted by Cabral, the paper emphasized the need for a revolution to change the socio-economic and psychological well-being of the masses. Only then can a distinction be made between revolutionary change and regime change. As the three Maghreb states recline to the pre-revolutionary days or even worse, the contention is that seizure of political power is not an end in itself unless it translates to ameliorating the deplorable social conditions of those societies. The paper also appeals to the international community not to be passive onlookers in the democratic experiments in the Maghreb states.

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