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Revolution in the Making

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Once there was an Ivy-League graduate who was asked to an interview for one of the top three ranking firms in Wall-Street. He reached the final cut, amongst the last 3 standing for the job. During the last interview, he was asked by the interviewer to answer the following scenario:

Assuming that he got the job, after 3 years of working there he became pretty rich indeed. Being so rich, he decided to treat himself with a 2-seater Porsche-coupe.

Then, you receive a phone call from one of your schoolmates from Harvard, inviting you to a great party with some Brown students in Cambridge, on Friday eve. You accept the invite, and sure enough you find yourself on the way to Boston. It was a rainy September with falling, heavy showers. Nearby Rhode Island you notice three figures from a distance. When you come closer you realize that one of them is your boss, who is stuck with his car. Next to him is standing a poor old lady, shaking from the freezing rain. And the third is an unbelievable pretty woman. The one from your dreams. What are you supposed to do? What do you decide? It's quite a big dilemma.

The common sense will tell you – no matter what will happen, you are to stay inside the car. In this case, it's hard to reach a reasonable and satisfying state if you take the boss – you lose your dreams, as well as your conscious. If you save your conscious – you most likely lose your job. If you give up the two possibilities, and you take the pretty woman, following & fulfilling your dreams, you live in a guilt conscious all your life, for sure becoming unemployed.

Shifting to the middle east arena since the upheaval all over the arab countries, starting late December 2011, how can we portrait or describe the response of the Arab driver? assuming that he is engaged in the 'driver dilemma'.

Uprisings and riots occurred all over the region. From Tunisia in the west to Jordan in the east and from Syria in the north to Yemen and Bahrain in the south. In the front of these turmoil stand the Arab youth in their twenties and thirties. They crossed boundaries of ideological world-views, of gender preferences, personal dreams, political leanings, and individual speculations. The virtual world of Twitter and Facebook became the real domain for collective action.

At the beginning, The name-of-the-game for most groups, Muslims and seculars, of all sections, all classes, all genders, is non-violent action, and rather mutual collective presence.

Given the above analysis, it is quite clear why the future is so hard to predict, even if the common sense or knowledge attracts the driver to either of the 3 'straight' or rather 'geometrical' choices. This is the case among journalists, researchers and politicians alike, who quite too easily tend to enjoy the slip on the linear slide which ends up in different and polarized edges or extremes. The one, can be called 'Metaphoric Realism'. According to its' adheres the possible change is that of 180 angles, from one tip to the other. Thus, in their eyes lays Western Democracy. For them, the coin has flipped on its back, as simple as that, and now – everything (western) is possible.

On the exact opposite edge, we find the 'Cultivated Realism' with its deterministic followers. This kind of realism expresses itself in-and-through all sorts of cultural essentialism, hence the eternal predicament of an 'authoritative' dictator is always around the corner, waiting for the right timing to emerge to the surface. Just as the first realism was seduced by its imagination, this one has none of it. For this

realism is cultivating continuity all the way to fixation, around notions such as ‘Arab world’ or ‘traditional values’.

In betwixt these two cloudy edges of the high-ground, suffocating the driver to stay in the car no matter what, there lies the multifold of the middle-ground that open the car’s door. This is certainly not a negative thing. Instead, it is a process of becoming, purely positive one. The fluid dynamics of the middle-ground does not leave the horizons as redundant, but keeps them as part of the fragmented interaction, yet not in absolute terms. It allows the driver to leave the car, keeping some of its past orientations, yet making way for the ‘new’ to branch out. The driver, be it the people or the leader, accepts in this way the friction attached to it.

When he leaves the car change is the new present, and the past could be rewritten, rendered by an unforeseen and open-ended future. This active synthesis is unique in its production of difference-crossing unification, as solidarity in its pure becoming, or the fusion of destinies. This is due to the abstract idealism that emerged as a uniting constituent of the massive and diversive crowd of protesters (as concrete materialism). The combination of these elements does not necessarily mean violence. Quite the opposite, for a strategic violent course is also driven by a goal-oriented edged reality, forcing the driver to decide decisive decision

about where does he stand, what are his picks, or: who gets in the car?

(And on whose expense?).

Abandonment of this standing on the high-ground of the static reality of realism gives way to the dynamic interacting procedure between varied elements in the (conflictual and multi-layered) totality. It could be referred to as 'the Realism of the Real'. This interaction, between the static\essentialistic reality and it's becoming – its process of production, resembles the one that was recalled by Redfield & Singer interaction of the 'little tradition' and the 'great' one, not in any moral way, but in positional elements that give and share in the process of constant feedback, self-evolving reciprocity and interconnectedness. This interacting with reality is thus the real realism, that of the middle-ground. It is pragmatic rather than dogmatic, and just like the story of the driver – it is the only true way, of getting the pretty woman.

In Egypt, a coalition comprised of educated youths, Islamic activists and many Egyptians kept marching onto Tahrir (Liberation) Square at the heart of Cairo for months. They chanted and sang "The People want the Regime to go". Having doing so, the Egyptians protesters has left the two-seat car, escaping the dilemma of extreme poles, that of supporting the regime and ruler, or the Islamist option.

This public uneasiness did not take the path we have come to know in the case of revolutions. They did not instantly form a political party thriving for a *'new order'*. They did not march on the Presidential Palace. Instead, they took the main square, settling firmly in the center of the city, in the middle ground of Cairo's hustle.

At first glance, one might assume that ordinary day-to-day reality occupies a middle ground, whereas the square represents the edged-extreme. The situation in Egypt was nearly reversed. It was everyday life which became extreme. There was no way up nor out. For the poorest members of society, ends could not be met no matter how hard they tried. For the young and educated middle class, frustration driven by hope and expectation was the main driving force.

Nonetheless, Egyptian youth represents an Arab generation which looks up to the world, perhaps for the first time in decades. Being a cosmopolitan is no longer the birthright of a selected few. The resources required to become aware of the world are now profoundly accessible and widespread. After 18 days of demonstrations, President Mubarak resigned on February 11, 2011 vacating the space of politics to emerging actors, who tried their power as early as March 19, in the democratic constitutional referendum. This middle-ground is taking shape, evolving

with time and friction between the growing secular middle-class, and traditional powers. Economic Wise, the middle-ground walks between the short-term of immediate needs, and the long-term wanted changes. While doing so, new economic practice and policy is also enacted.

The events raging in other Middle Eastern countries do not necessarily conform exactly to the Egyptian model. Still, they demonstrate the immensity of the middle ground challenge and the threat it represents in the eyes of authoritarian regimes.

In Yemen, the 2011 escalation of events, began when presidential snipers positioned on nearby roofs attacked a sit-in outside Sana'a University.

The sit-in, which hosted tens of thousands of demonstrators, included a diverse coalition of tribal representatives, Yemeni youth and other elements. It is this attempt to form a middle ground that was attacked from above. Yet mediating coalitions are still emerging and circumventing as wills becomes institutionalized, struggling with difficulties of decentralized society, fractured political opposition, sectarian interests pursuing, and low-grade infrastructure (especially oil, water and fuel). Even so, plans have been made for the withdrawal of President Saleh, with the accompany of a new presidential elections following shortly. Meanwhile, Saleh insistence on staying inside the car,

perusing one of the three choices while having the party (as his rule) in mind, or worst, deliberating endlessly between them, have led him into a position in which reality (and outer factors) decides for him. After severe injuries, Saleh, along with other 30 family members, have left Yemen to (get medical treatment in) Saudi-Arabia. His departure left a power vacuum, making actual place for new potential actors to emerge. Among these contestants we find his sons and nephews, holding the keys to the elite security forces and the secret services, in a way that reminds 'Mafia state'. Also a major actor is the Army General Ali-Mohsin that defected as early as march, commanding his men to defend the protesters in Sana'a and elsewhere. Opposing the (official) armed forces is the largest tribal confederation Hashid, headed by Al-Ahmar, that holds the keys to major industrial companies and cellular corporations thus allowing them to forge a major front to the president's supporters. It is those divisions and diffusions that have put a heavy weight on the Vice President Hadi, while President Saleh is abroad. Hadi is to decide between the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) 'deal' for a quiet transition and the continues folk-protest for an overall treatment and not cosmetic changes masterminded by Saudis and supported also by Yemen's split yet unifying opposition.

In the Persian Gulf, opposition groups are attempting to create civic middle grounds, and are doing so with mixed uncertainties. In Bahrain, many of the demonstrators were Shi'a but they were not protesting or calling for victory over the Sunni minority which rules Bahrain, but collaborated with them seeking reforms. The opposition was hardly sectarian. Nevertheless, with reforms taken as false pretense, protesters faced live-fire and religious divisions came to assist controlling the rioting people. Since March, a division also forged the ruling family, caused by the influence stressed by the Saudis (and UAE) and its revulsion of Iran, against the internal expectations of the people.

In Saudi Arabia, the authorities fear a middle ground of Saudi Shi'a, Sunni intellectuals and the economically deprived. In response, the Saudi King has decreed nearly 100 billion Saudi Riyals (1 SR = 0.27 US\$) in order to ease the people's tension, through raising wages and promoting welfare. On the other hand, the king also sent thousands of Saudi soldiers for the containment and suppression of Bahraini protesters.

This is true in the case of Jordan and Algeria as well. These reforms were a product of the fear of middle ground coalitions between Islamists, trade unions and marginal sectors.

Syria, long considered one of the most stable dictatorships in the middle-east region, is leaning in the same direction. While sectarian demonstrators in many cities have been crushed with an iron fist, President Assad, mobilizing his devoted army, is entertaining a preventive approach. Although violently repressing the protests, he announced steps toward political and economical reforms, promising improved rights, firing key cabinet members and assenting to some dialogue with an opposition he hardly recognized previously, on top of lifting long-lasting state-of-emergency laws. As the rising death toll continues, red flags are also raised by the international community. A French-Anglo-Saxon pact is emerging confronting opposition from eastern powers as China and Russia. Yet instead an active and combative intervention, Syrians hope for the seclusion of Assad until his ground will literally disappear below his feet. Young popular committees, deep underground in Syria, are liaising and organizing among themselves. They are getting their voice to the outside world at a time when the Syrian regime is forbidding any foreign media from reporting in the country, and they have learned and adapted remarkably quickly as they are, for example, operating a YouTube Channel. Thus Pres. Bashar Assad has to react both to his growing outer opposition as well to the inner one,

leaving him less and less choices for a self-preserving action, a place all too similar to Saleh's eyes.

Muammar Qaddafi of Libya chose to actively combat the becoming middle ground which rebelled against his rule. His forces have repelled rebel attacks. They have also thrown the international community into disarray.

Qaddafi's insistence on fighting till the very end has revealed that he remains an exception to the rule in the Middle East. Contrary to Egypt and Tunisia, who enabled the young drivers to get outside the car, and choose the pretty woman, heading to the square. Or, hesitating rulers, such-as Bahrain, Saudi-Arabia, Morocco, Jordan and possibly Syria - that hesitates and negotiate with the passengers, Qaddafi in any case, took the car, stepped on it and fled the scene.

What then can be said regarding the Israeli driver?

Well, the driver who's in-charge on the Israeli car continues to drive in his 2- seater Porsche, listening to great music yet is hardly aware to the bus-stop.

The Israeli driver thus continues to drive, dedicated nearly at all costs, to preventing the necessity of choosing one alternative (say, the boss) over

the other (say, the old lady). But what about the pretty woman? Some Arab drivers, however, appears not only to have seen the bus stop, but took advantage of the pretty potential over mundane status quo. Young Arab demonstrators have embraced an unknown future over the current state of affairs. Choosing the middle-ground is to challenge their political conventions and convictions. Can Israel as a driver, do the same? Otherwise, the risk is that someone else will make the decision relating to the Israeli future.

Based on this analysis, identifiable are three main elements, or constituents, which are the conditions-of-possibility for the Middle-Ground reality to emerge and prosper. First is the notion of collectivism. A strong sense and feeling of collective spirit transformed sectarian interests into a uniting middle rendering deep solidarity among the people. The strength of this process is the border-crossing idea making its way through the now fuzzy borders, allowing a genuine identification between the people to take place. Second, it is the revolutionary policy forming a controlled markers of what some have termed as 'politics of non-violent avoidance', where every solution for reforms is taken as an insult to the aspirations of the protesters, and thus rejected. This line of action echoes Melville's Bartleby saying "*I prefer not to...*", to what is termed 'Bartleby Politics'. Thirdly there is the non-violent struggle that is so important to keep unity going. As one Syrian put it "*no continuity without unity*". Keeping a distance from the

high-ground of a strategic violent course of action make sure that the protesters are staying free of biased struggles for what could create divisions and partitions. Rather, the people insisted on a mode of action that circulates around struggle as-such.

The result of a conjuncture between those elements constitutes a fertile land for the middle-ground. From this land could spur all new coalitions between parties, and new bonds between people. 'Sticking to the plan' in a revolutionary situation means allowing for this process to unfold. One of the major benefits of that process is a close interaction with the changing reality, making oneself (and the driver) a part of it, and not just an observer. In that way the driver sees reality as it is, thus realizing that the concrete-universal goal of the woman, is not at the Cambridge party, but right there – in that bus stop station.