

On the Difficulty in Predicting and Understanding the Arab Spring: Orientalism, Euro-Centrism, and Modernity

Magid Shihade

Abstract

In this paper I discuss how the events unfolding in the Arab world since early 2011, termed as the Arab Spring, are not easily understood as suggested by many western (as well as Arab) commentators and scholars. This is due, in part, to three dynamics, Orientalism, Euro-Centrism, and Modernity, that have a longer history in shaping our knowledge about the Arab world and the world at large. I will discuss these concepts and how they still have relevance in contributing to misunderstanding the so called "Arab Spring."

Introduction to terms/concepts

In the beginning, let me clarify the three main concepts (Modernity, Euro-Centrism, and Orientalism) that I deploy in this paper and the way I understand them to impact the way we perceive knowledge and also the knowledge that is produced, especially when it comes to societies and people outside of what is called Europe/West.

I use the term modernity as it is used by scholars such as Enrique Dussel and Walter Mignolo, among other scholars of the Latin American subaltern group who are engaged in the development of the concepts of modernity/coloniality. The term in this framework is used to mean the way Western epistemology or scholarly narrative and claims arguing that since the 16th century, Europe/the West arrived at a new stage in history that is completely different from the previous historical epoch, where human rationality became the central tool for understanding human societies; an epoch that replaced past periods that were marked by the dominant superstitious beliefs and lacked the rational and scientific approach to the studying of human social, economic, and political developments. This approach to knowledge, while dismissing the certainty of "knowledge" based on religious dogmas, came to create a human certainty of knowledge, and in a sense, Man came to replace God as source of knowledge about all aspects of our lives. Since humans were declared a rational being (Descartes, Beacon), man/human behavior can be studied rationally and understood and predicted with almost complete certainty.

Euro-Centrism, connected to the concept of modernity, is used here in the framework developed by Samir Amin, among others, where knowledge production, concepts, frameworks about human societies produced in Europe/the West became global/universal ones. What explained human societies in Europe/the West came to be taken as universal; it came to explain or to understand how all human societies behaved, expected from life, and its behavior predicted. Concepts such as humans, freedom, liberty, justice, and so many others, were not only seen as the product of

Western/European epistemological production that no other culture was able to produce, but also were presented, the way they were explained, as something that all humans around the world should strive to achieve. Of course, what other humans/cultures produced in the past, or thought about these concepts, was not of any interest. Here also, one can think of epistemic racism and denial; other cultures knowledge production was not acknowledged, and whatever was not possible to deny was deemed not as important or valid.

Orientalism, as developed by Edward Said and later used by different scholars to explain similar reality in regards to different regions and groups of people from around the world, is a concept that explains how Europe/the West and its knowledge production, including literary production, viewed the peoples/societies of the Orient (in Said's case, Arabs and Muslims) were seen and represented as passive, backward, chaotic, violent, and always in needs of Western intervention/help in order to become, if possible, modern and rational beings. This approach as explained by Said has been taking place on two fronts: in ideas about, knowledge production about, and representation of people and societies in the Arab/Muslim world. Accompanying that, and influenced by it, was also the direct practices of interventions, colonization, and wars against the people of the region; from the French colonization of Egypt in the end of the 18th century, the Israeli colonization of Palestine in the 20th century, to the colonization of Iraq and Afghanistan in the 21st century.

All these concepts or frameworks, which frame my analysis in the following sections of this article, were used, often together, as a justification for European/Western colonization of peoples and societies around the so called global South. They also justified not only colonization, a term that meant in the past to help these people to become rational, modern, and developed, but also justified slavery, conquest, and killing in the name of getting rid of barbarity, chaos, and irrationality (Achille Mbembe, 2003). Thus, Western Empires (Spanish, Portuguese, French, British, and US/American) since the 16th century have colonized and dominated the world/South in the name of stability, peace, development, progress, liberation, human rights, humanitarian aid, democracy promotion, and other. When formal Empires and colonization was no longer accepted, new forms of control, domination, and hegemony, came to replace old forms of rule, all to maintain what Immanuel Wallerstein and Samir Amin, and many other scholars, western hegemony and dominance on the one hand, and dependency of the global South on the other. While in the past empires and colonial powers ruled directly, of course always with the help of some locals working as compradors/middle men, since mid-twentieth century the domination was shaped by global international bodies (UN, World Bank...etc.) with local leaders acting as local persecutors of policies (economic, political...etc.) maintained western hegemony and interests.

Introduction to the Events in the Arab World

Whatever name we assign to the events in the Arab world, we end up trapping ourselves in one limiting, or problematic framework or another. The concept of seasons is embedded in a long history of Orientalizing the region, as if what happened in the history of the Arab world before 2011 did not qualify for an acknowledgment of

the energies, struggles, and fighting for a better life that the Arab people have been waging against western colonialism, intrusions, and unjust local governments for over 100 years. From Algeria, Egypt, Yemen, Iraq, to Palestine, the Arab people have been putting up a hard fight for over a century against western colonial, and neo colonial capitalist and racist modernity. But this is hardly registered in a western-centric mindset and in the dominant discourse, neither among many in the Arab world itself.

Notwithstanding the obsession in the West with the Arab World and involvement in it for centuries, and despite the claim of superior knowledge, the Arab people continue to be “misunderstood,” and or maligned, and western-centric established academic “theories” continue to fail to explain, and or predict developments in the region. With every failure, a more arrogant wave of “theories” come to the fore by the same failing western-centric expertise and theorization that come to replace/continue and rehabilitate the old paradigms of “knowledge” as if nothing had happened. Failures evaded, and “expertise, analyses, and prescriptions” with the same arrogance continue to take place.

In spite of a long history of revolutions in the Arab world in the last 100 years from Palestine, Algeria, Egypt to elsewhere in the region, it is correct to argue that not many scholars, commentators, and experts have expected the recent Arab revolution to take place. This is both true to Western and Arab/Muslim experts, commentators, and scholars alike. It is true that there were many studies and commentaries in the last two decades concerning the possible explosions of youth, with their overrepresentation demographically. But these were more warnings or fear of possible “chaos” and “extremism,” warnings about the younger generation’s lack of job opportunities and what might lead to. So, the only expectation or prediction was based on fear of the unknown, fear of youth, fear of “chaos,” fear of “extremism.” In other words, it was also fear of the change of the status quo, especially when it comes to economic, political and security concerns, that are at the heart of western interests in the region. It is also an Orientalist and racist framework that sees peoples’ possible needs as alarming, as possible danger. People’s needs and aspiration and their self-determination are not of any concern here, rather western’s interests what matters.

More so, even when the revolution erupted in Tunisia, many kept doubting it, and or refraining from calling it as such. As the revolution succeeded in Egypt in removing the Mubarak regime, similar arguments and comments were made about the events there. When the revolution in Egypt managed to topple Mubarak's regime, many were quick to judge its nature and possibility for success. Some argued that the case of Egypt was a military coup. Others feared the Islamic movement to take over. Similar arguments were made in regards to other Arab countries.

Central to all these arguments is whether these are “real” revolutions, and whether these revolutions are the making of the West (Europe, U.S., and Israel), and a doubt in the agency of the Arab people to make their own history. To understand such arguments/questions, I believe that three concepts are worth considering. These three concepts are: Orientalism, Euro/Western-centrism, and Modernity, all as ideas and practices of intervention in the region politically, militarily, culturally, and intellectually. This pattern of misunderstanding and judging of historical developments in the Arab world, and the Arab people is due to at least these three

issues that are interrelated; Modernity, Orientalism, and Euro-centrism, that have been at work in combination since the ascendancy of West to global hegemony.

Since the rise to dominance of capitalist western modernity, the assumption that humans are rational and thus we can achieve accurate knowledge, as well as that humans can be accurately studied and their behavior accurately analyzed and predicted, has shaped academic fields. This was accompanied by a denial of the contribution of knowledge of different cultures from around the world, and with a western-centric approach to knowledge that not only universalized “theories” and explanations of questions related to human societies, but also was embedded in a project of western global domination that aimed at maintaining western supremacy and the subjugation of the rest of the world and maintaining its dependence. This modern western-Eurocentric knowledge and approach to knowledge was and continues to be shaped, as it is related to the Arab world and the global South in general, by a racist and orientalist attitude that colors the views of even those who claim and even might be against western hegemony and are supportive of or in solidarity with the Arab people and other peoples in the global South. There are of course exceptions to this rule, but they only come to prove the rule (Said, 1978, Amin, 2010, Lowe, 2000).

Too many experts that claim sympathy to the Arab people’s struggles, and claim to be in opposition to Western hegemony and exploitation of the globe have rushed quickly to claim expertise on the Arab revolution, and to make early judgments on it weeks or few months after it started, as if it is something that ended, rather than seeing it as something that is in the making.

Of course, these experts failed to remember that the French Revolution, the most celebrated example of people’s power to change history according to the Eurocentric historiography, took years to achieve some of its goals, later on to be hijacked by the dictatorship of Napoleon who led the same French people to wars against European powers and to colonize large parts of the world. The slogans of “liberty, equality, and fraternity” were soon after that forgotten and domination and genocides against peoples in the Third World became the norm of the French “Republic,” and its legacy, and continues to be part and parcel of the French involvements in different parts of the world that is used for resources and hegemony. Nothing less is expected from the U.S. and Britain and their western NATO allies, as old colonial rule was replaced with imperialist and neo-colonial structures of domination and exploitation (Dussel, 1993, Samir Amin, May 2011, Mignolo, 2000).

In the many reports, talks, and conferences, ad or papers about the Arab revolution, old orientalist and neo-orientalist narratives and perspectives continue to present the Arab world as either; dangerous, chaotic, and violent, or; stagnant, passive, and always in need for help from the outside (from the West), which mirrors the official discourse of Western governments. When revolutions erupted, quick claims of western influence shaped much of the discourse. Ideas of the so called “non-violence thinker” Gene Sharp (whose main work and analysis of violence, oppression, and dictatorship, has only focused on East European, and Third World countries, and for some “reason” ignores almost completely about U.S. and Israeli wars and oppressions), were argued to be guiding ideology of the youth in Egypt (Nagam, 2012). Israeli and other western media constantly showed reservations and fear from

the unknown, or possible chaos, or danger of “radicals” taking over governments in the region (Salaita, 2012, Massad, November 2011).

Of course such arguments and representations managed and continue to manage to ignore the history of activism in the Arab world against economic, political, social, colonialist, and imperialist repressions, and against local dictatorships that were and some continue to be supported by the West. They also ignore that Arab youth in Europe and its history of resistance to and revolts against racism and their struggle along with other marginalized groups for economic, social and political justice in Europe.

Thus, the struggles of peoples in the South seem to continue to be ignored, manipulated to fit western interests, or when impossible it is maligned as work of “fanaticism.” When it manages to overcome local, regional, and global restraints and succeeds, than these struggles are celebrated to be co-opted as the work of “Western influence.”

The history of western interventions in the South, not only militarily, politically, and economically, but also intellectually have not only created a disfigured “Oriental” minds, but also Western ones. Not only those who were made to believe that their history of knowledge production was not valid or irrelevant have often ended up only mimicking and reproducing western paradigms and distanced themselves from their local knowledge as they also came to see it as “backward,” or irrelevant. Also, those in the west who came to believe that western knowledge is the “real accurate and useful” knowledge, which led not only to some feeling of supremacy, but also led many to avoid taking alternative knowledge seriously, which would have helped better explain human societies and its changes. The end result was on the one hand, the marginalization of diverse and more democratic knowledge, and on the other side an insistence on paradigms and frameworks that continue to prove their inadequacy.

This pattern continues to shape discourse today about all issues including the developments in the Arab world, where constant writing, conferences, talks, books, and workshops shaped by this same western-centric approach, that failed to predict or explain what happened in the Arab world, yet continue to insist on shaping the understanding and the outcome of events there to fit the interests of the west (including Israel), and continue to lecture about how things should be, as if people there are like instruments in their hands and will listen and behave accordingly. Again, not only interventions are taking place in military, political, and economic forms in Libya, Syria, Egypt, Tunisia, and elsewhere, but also “intellectual” campaigns, another form of western terrorism, is going unabated.

All this, in addition to the selective interventions of the West in many countries, the selective support for some “revolutions,” and on other hand the support western governments give to brutal regimes such as Saudi Arabia, and the support they give to the Israeli military settler colonial project, and their war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq at this movement, that is a part of their long history of crimes against native peoples and peoples in general in the South, their history of exploitation of resources in the South, and their history of maintaining underdevelopment and dependency there, all make the situation in the Arab world unpredictable, and not much understood.

And finally, it is inconceivable, without the impact of continued western-centrism, western modernity and orientalism, without such cultural and intellectual interventions and terror, to have any other form of intervention, and these factors remain an obstacle to understanding the Arab world (and the global South at large), important factors that warrant some elaboration.

Orientalism: passivity, agency and change

In the racist representation of the Arab and Muslim worlds, Orientalism depicted Arab and Muslim peoples as lazy, lacking the vitality for change, and lacking the spirit of initiative. They were deemed thus as lacking the power to make history of their own creation and always in need for outside forces - the West - to achieve change, and "progress." This representation, image of the Arabs continues to frame the discourse of mainstream as well as not so mainstream analyses (Said, 1978, Massad November 2011, Salaita 2012).

All the conditions were present that might drive people to revolt in the Arab world for a long time, such as economic, social, and political oppressions and consciousness of that oppression (as Abd El-Rahman Al-Kawakibi theorized decades ago). If there is anything different about the time that these current revolutions started to take place was the exhaustion of the U.S. Zionist led empire both in Iraq and Afghanistan, at the time when such revolutions were not expected, and attention and resources were directed elsewhere; mainly on Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Iran. This is also why these revolutions took western powers by surprise, not only the local dictators, who are mostly supported by western governments. Yet, after the revolutions were hard to stop, Western rhetoric (official and non-official alike) was framed through this Orientalist culture of "knowledge."

Some liberals argued that the "non-violence" nature of the revolution in Tunisia, but especially in Egypt was largely influenced by the fact that some individuals involved in the revolution came to the U.S. for training and learning of the methods of non-violent activism and the theory of Gene Sharp, among others, on peaceful transformations (see for example Financial Times, February 15, 2011, New York Times, February 16, 2011, and PeaceNewslog.info, May 28, 2011).

Not only Western thought and ideas helped the revolution according to this narrative, but also the power of western technology (the Internet, Facebook, Twitter, phone messaging...etc.), which supposedly shaped these revolutions. This is of course without any serious and critical study about the number/percentage of users, and also as if without such technology, the revolution would not have happened, and which is also contradicts or evades the history of revolutions in the region that has been taking place there for decades without such technology.

So, again, if any change takes place in the Arab world, it must be due to, influenced by, or aided by Western ideas, thought, and technology. Thus, according to this narrative, even if the events were not shaped by direct western intervention, they were shaped by these indirect tools.

Orientalism and penetrating and arousing: Gendering the Orient

In his critique of a typical orientalist writing about Arabs and Muslims, Edward Said (1978) took the work of Bernard Lewis as an example. In this context, he focused on the essentialising and gendering language used by Bernard Lewis. In Said's critique, Lewis attempted at explaining Arabs through their language. Thus, according to him, Arabs do not have the concept of revolution because the word "revolution" does not exist in their language. The word *thawra* in Arabic for revolution, according to Lewis, is derived from the root *thaara*, which is more being aroused or moved by something else, a sexual object, or sexual desire. The Arabs according to Lewis, since the rise of western modernity, witnessed change only due to western "penetration" in the region. This, in Said's view, is typical of gendered and sexualized Orientalists writing about the region and the way such experts saw the region and its people: as only recipient of ideas, of acts of pleasure and "progress" that come only at the hands of those leading western modernity. They have no agency of their own, and as similar to female passivity in the framing of knowledge and action according to White western masculinity, we should not expect from Arabs much more than emotional reactions to acts of penetration and arousing.

Self-Orientalism

Such Orientalist representations have also an echo in the self-orientalizing among some Arabs and Muslims themselves, who, as suggested in the beginning of the paper, do not believe in the power of the Arab people to make their own history. Their history has to be shaped by others and this is either due to their weakness and or due to the power of the West and its technology. Thus, the revolutions in the Arab world, according to this view, are merely the making of the West (US, Europe, and Israel).

One can see here, how such Orientalism and self-Orientalism mirror a conspiracy theory, especially when conspiracy theory does not challenge the official narrative, but rather confirms it, and lends support to it. What such conspiracy theory, similar to Orientalism, highlight for me are two things: lack of clear evidence of such arguments on the one hand, and on the other, negligence to evidence contrary to such arguments. The many examples from history that show the agency of Arabs to challenge foreign hegemony and local compradors as it has been happening in Palestine, Lebanon, Egypt, Algeria, Iraq and elsewhere, are neglected.

In addition to Orientalism and self-Orientalism, there are another two factors that contributed and continue to contribute to the difficulty of predicting, evaluating, and understanding the Arab revolutions, one of which is western centric approaches to theorizing and analyses.

Euro/Western-centrism and theory, knowledge, and analyses

Theories of social movements and revolutions/change, including Marxist approaches, continue to dominate Western academy and knowledge production, including academics and intellectuals in the non-western world. These theories are

seen as universal and are applied to studying societies around the world. These objectified societies, thus serve only as recipients of theoretical interventions, they serve as a laboratory of western-centric thought and theorizing. According to this approach, change, and revolutions must happen according to these theories, and if they don't, then they are not considered revolutions nor evidence of a change. The case of the Arab revolutions is only one example of such interventions to evaluate, judge public perceptions of them both in western societies as well as among Arab societies as well.

For example, in his talk at Mada Al-Carmel (www.mada-research.org, August, 2011) Joel Beinin described the event/changes in Egypt as half revolution/half military coup, which borders an analysis that is half Orientalist, and half Marxist fantasy and disappointment about what is expected from the revolution in Egypt. Of course, such an early judgment overlooks the fact that the revolution is at its early stage and it is unrealistic to make any final judgment about an event that is still in the making. This Egyptian revolution is not a historical event that ended and can be judged, but an event in the making, and it is too early to judge.

But this is not so for Zizek - the European thinker, who argues that the Arab Revolution is over, is dead. Hamid Dabashi correctly responds and argues that Zizek's view is embedded on an old Marxist world, and that the world is dead for him, because the world now is not of his own making, but rather the making of those Arabs, Muslims and others who started to shake the American Zionist led Empire, and these are mostly outside of Zizek's and other European/western thinkers' paradigms of change and world view (Hamid Dabashi, September 1, 2011). What Hamid Dabashi did not point to, is that for Marx and Marxists, revolutions do not happen in "Asiatic" societies due to their mode of production, a mode that is not industrial and thus for such Marxist approaches, colonizing India by the British was a good intervention as it is the only way to bring that Asiatic society to terms with modern capitalist western industrial economic mode of production that can lead to a possible revolution. This is in part due to the fact that events do not follow the normal path of politics and revolution, and scholars have a hard time accepting these events as revolutions among other political acts, because they do follow the pattern of parties, leadership, and hierarchy (Nigam, 2012). Furthermore, Marx's prediction on the possibility of revolution in Britain rather than in Russia was left out by Marxist theories decades and centuries later. It was left out because it might have disturbed the theory that they believe in, rather than being open to re-evaluating certainty in theories of historical change, certainty that has shaped not only theorizing but also praxis and interventions.

Thus, Zizek's view and analysis is not an exception, it is rather an analysis that is embedded in Western modernity's thought and practice (by conservatives, liberals, and radicals alike), that does not help us understand much. It rather contributes often to confusion and mis-judgments, because we often take it at its face value, without much questioning, and leads many often to justify interventions (in all forms including colonizing other societies), with much negative impacts on peoples' lives and psyche who never in the first place asked for help, advise, or interventions.

So, rather than leaving the Arab public alone to shape its own history, those from the right and the left continue to intervene, hand in hand with and or parallel to Western states political, economic, and military interventions that come only to hinder

real change, and only to arrest any development that stems from peoples' choice and aspirations, and that might not be in line with preconceived theories, or preconceived interests.

Modernity: as an idea, and as a practice

The brief discussion of the different ideas and analyses about the Arab revolution discussed so far can be further understood in the context of western modernity, and its linkage to knowledge, power, and practice. In other words, these ideas and analyses do not come from a vacuum, but rather they are part of a long history of knowledge production and have worked hand in hand with power/politics practiced since the inception of western capitalist modernity; western modernity both as idea as well as a practice.

As an idea (certainty, knowledge, rationality...)

With the inception of western modernity the claims have been that the history of the past of human societies has reached a different period that will change the world forever. The West claimed to have discovered the secrets of human history; a discovery that will lead to a world based on justice, equality, peace and progress. Humans were not only declared as rational beings/actors, but also as objects of study, whose behavior can be studied, judged, predicted, and even engineered with complete certainty. Thus, the certainty of religious dogmas of pre western modernity was replaced by the certainty of human dogmas. Ideas and opinions became theories through claims and through power (Dussel, Autumn 1993, Mignolo, 2011).

Such theories and such knowledge production was embedded in power (Dussel, Autumn 1993), and were also embedded in pre-conceived notions of truth/myths/Orientalism (Said, 1978, Mitchell, 1988), and race/racial superiority, and entangled in the history of western colonial projects, imperialist practices, and neo colonial structures. These preconceived notions about the Other packaged through theories and knowledge production shaped colonial practices on the ground and continue to do to this day.

In *Colonizing Egypt*, Timothy Mitchell (1988) discusses the British colonial intervention in Egypt in the late 19th century. Mitchell shows how that intervention was based on prior image/representations of the Egyptian lands and its peoples. But, when reality on the ground did not fit these "theories," and preconceived notions of what Egypt and the Egyptians ought to be, rather than rethinking the already available knowledge/myths, reality instead and Egypt and the Egyptians were to be engineered, and reengineered to fit not only interests (economic) but also to fit the knowledge/myth that was available prior to these Western interventions, prior to these encounters. Mitchell's analysis is a useful example of the link between thought, imagination, and practice of western modernity, but it is only one example of western modernity as a thought-practice and the gap between claims and reality, which has a longer history, and continues to shapes every adventure of western powers in the region. When the Americans were preparing to invade Iraq in 2003, they distributed handbooks for their soldiers that were used by the British military during the British

colonial period in Iraq in early 20th century, that explained in brief how soldiers ought to understand local culture, and how they ought to treat the people there (we call this today "cultural sensitivity"). This is as if people there do not change, and as if these handbooks helped the British at all, and who were kicked out of Iraq not long after the start of the colonization in the 1920s.

Of course this view of Arabs has roots in western modernity and Enlightenment rationality, where Kant figures large. When Kant, one of the leading figures and thinkers of western modern thought, spoke of human rights and human agency of thought and action, he had in mind only the western white man, and for him the Other were beyond this faculty (Judy, 1993). Kant's perspective on the white westerner has helped shape, with other major "thinkers," and the knowledge they produced was taken for granted, the way the West dealt with the rest of the world. This entanglement and intervention of the West in the rest of the world was fraught with double talk, colonialism, racism, intervention to "save," to "modernize," to "democratize," to "liberate women," to bring "peace," and a long list of such claims that contradict reality from the beginning of western ascendancy to power to this day, in the Arab world (Salt, 2008), but also elsewhere in the global South/Third World.

This modernity as a thought and as a practice has created a feeling of ambiguity, of confusion about, and suspicion of the revolutions in the Arab world, as they are seen/perceived not free or disconnected but rather related to the western history of interventions, of mingling into the Arab World. Even those of us who support these revolutions cannot help but be disgusted at the practices and rhetoric of the West about these revolutions whether this is in Libya, Syria or anywhere else (Prashad, 2012, Haddad, 2012, Salt, 2012, Kanna, 2012). This is evident from the history of such interventions, as I will discuss later on in the paper, histories of western interventions whether in the Arab world or elsewhere, where western thought and practice has been long applied on bodies and minds of people who became objects to western power, a form of thought terror that was matched by the terror of the guns that killed millions of peoples from around the non-Western world.

Although this history is documented by many scholars, in my view western policy regarding interventions/non-interventions/selective intervention can also be dissected through a pattern. We do not need a clear and public statement on such policy, but all what we need is to figure out a pattern through different examples that can reflect such policy even when it is not stated publicly.

When Western countries such as the United States or some European countries talk of the need to intervene in Libya or Syria because the people there want freedom and change, which no one doubts that people there want that, one wonders about why these states were in the first place supporting oppressive regimes as long as they went along with their policies (Amin 2012, Massad, May 2011, Salt, 2012, Shahshani and Mullin, 2012). Why did the United States (also France and other European countries) support the regime of Hosni Mubarak, when the information about the oppressive structure of that regime was well known and public? Why would such states support the regime in Saudi Arabia, who is authoritarian and repressive? Or why at this very moment, while claiming to be champions of peoples' voice, they did not oppose Saudi Arabia's intervention in Bahrain that came to suppress Bahrainis' protests against the

oppressive monarchy? Or, why would such states not stand with the people in Palestine who have been crying and fighting for liberation from Israeli colonial rule?

Such supposedly double standards and hypocrisy are not as such, but rather are evidence and in line with western racism, interests and policies, and history of imposition and intervention in the region and its people.

Conclusion

In my discussion so far, I have tried to push for acknowledging the complexity of human history, Arab history, western interventions, and the effect of "knowledge" such as Orientalism, and western-centric approaches to theory of change, and modernity, complicated history between its claims and reality of its practices. I suggested that these dynamics are forms of interventions, in line with political, economic, and military ones, that were imposed on the people of the region (the Arab world, as elsewhere in the Third World) for a long time. In fact, without these factors it will be harder to convince people in the West to go to wars in the Arab world (and elsewhere). Yet, acknowledging the effects of these dynamics nevertheless should not cloud our thought about the Arab Revolution, and at least should not cloud our thought in regards to taking a position towards these revolutions, while opposing imperialism.

Responding to a journalist question about what he thinks of the French Revolution two hundred years later, the Chinese official answered: "It is too early to tell." My understanding of this is not that we need to wait hundreds of years to see the results, but rather to see the revolution as a continuous process that has no beginning, and even might not have an end, where people all around the world continue to struggle to change the unjust conditions they live under.

As Samir Amin suggested, the Arab revolution must be seen as a part of the history and lineage of youth uprisings and revolutions in the region against colonialism, and corrupt regimes in the postcolonial period, a period that has been shaped by neocolonial global structure of domination of the West over the same people they colonized directly earlier. And these western interventions, with the help of local compradors, aimed at exploiting local resources, preventing the region from developing, and maintaining the dependency of the region within the western global system, and thus hurt the majority of people living there (Amin, June 8, 2011, May 2012).

Furthermore, as Immanuel Wallerstein suggested in his writing about Libya, we need also to: reexamine the rhetoric of anti-imperialism of leaders such as Gaddafi, while at the same time not to exaggerate western/American power as it is declining and trying to make the best out of it, and salvage whatever possible to help the U.S. as a leading power in this global imperialist system that is waning, and unable to control events from Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, to now even in Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and elsewhere (Wallerstein, February 1, 2011).

Thus, the quick intervention in Libya must not be seen as an intervention to help the revolution as such, but to co-opt it, and to shape the further development of the revolutions in the region. The intervention in Libya was about to make the revolution less appealing to other places. It also shows the hypocrisy as there has

been no intervention in Bahrain or Palestine on behalf of the people who have been fighting for justice, liberation, and equality. The West only intervenes for self-interest and to maintain western supremacy in the region, and to maintain control over its resources and peoples and hence its continuous dependence. Intervention only happens to demobilize local revolts, and they take place only when western supremacy is threatened, and to cover-up for their impotency, whose signs started to appear in the last years whether in Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, or Palestine, where this wave of Arab revolutions is against dictatorships that either worked fully with the West, or served them at times by their rhetoric, and other times by their actions.

The imperialist system is exhausted militarily and financially, and the spirit of the peoples' revolution in the Arab world, and elsewhere, will no longer accept the policies of the past, and there is clear commitment to keep pushing for real, not cosmetic, change in internal and external policies. We see that in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain and elsewhere. But, we need to be patient with our judgments of these revolutions, and not expect too much too early.

After all, there is no revolution in history that was fast to achieve its goals, no revolution in history was clear about its end goals in the small details from the beginning, and that while history is a lesson to learn from, we should not be stuck with historical lessons and paradigms of knowledge as if no new knowledge is possible and as if history repeats itself only to confirm our suspicion of change.

Knowledge is not static, it is evolving process not only about new information, but also about new paradigms and new ideas, and we should not dismiss the power of people who suffer to give us more food for thought. Thus, we need to continue to challenge mainstream and traditional theories and practices not for a new history to be written, but also for new ideas, theories, and thought that is not hostage to western modernity, western-centrism of knowledge and Orientalism.

By way of ending the paper, it is worth remembering what Timothy Mitchell in *Colonizing Egypt* (1988) spoke of about the difference between the rigidity and claims of certainty of western forms of and attitudes to knowledge, compared to non-western forms of knowledge such as that of Ibn Khaldoun that is more flexible, less rigid, less certain, and less embedded in "theory" as such, but in ideas and thought that while might appear to give complete and fully coherent answers, it allows more room for complexity, and for different outcomes and possibilities.

References

- Amin, Samir. 2012. "The Arab revolutions: a year after." *Interface: a journal for and about social movements*. Vol. 4, No1, May, pp. 33 – 42.
<http://www.interfacejournal.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Issue-4-1-Full-PDF.pdf> June 8, 2011.
 "An Arab Springtime?" <http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/features/73902> (Accessed on July 28, 2012).
 2010. *Eurocentrism - Modernity, Religion and Democracy: A Critique of Eurocentrism and Culturalism*. 2nd edition, Oxford: Pambazuka Press.

- Dabashi, Hamid. September, 1. 2011. Zizek and Gaddafi: Living in the old world.
<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/08/201183113418599933.html>
 (Accessed on August 2, 2012).
- Dussel, Enrique. 1993. "Eurocentrism and Modernity." *boundary 2*, Autumn, Vol. 20, No. 3, pp.65-76.
- Financial Times. February, 15, 2011. "US non-violence center trained Egypt activists."
<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/89a67d42-3ae9-11e0-8d81-00144feabdc0.html>. (Accessed March, 13, 2012).
- Haddad, Bassam. 2012. "Syria, the Arab uprisings, and the political economy of authoritarian resilience." *Interface: a journal for and about social movements*. Vol. 4, No1, May, pp. 113 – 130. <http://www.interfacejournal.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Issue-4-1-Full-PDF.pdf>
- Judy, Ronald. 1993. *Dis-Forming the American Canon: African-Arab Slave Narrative and the Vernacular*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Kanna, Ahmad. 2012. "A politics of non-recognition? Biopolitics of Arab Gulf worker protests in the year of uprisings." *Interface: a journal for and about social movements*. Vol. 4, No1, May, pp.146-164. <http://www.interfacejournal.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Issue-4-1-Full-PDF.pdf>
- Lowe, Lisa. 2000. "Turkish Embassy Letters," in *Orientalism: A reader*, edited by Alexander Lyon Macfie. New York University Press.
- Massad, Joseph. November 18, 2011. Arab revolts - past and present. Arabs have historically revolted every decade against rulers and the west has counter-revolted most attempts.
<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/11/2011111810259215940.html>
 (Accessed on August 2, 2012).
- May 18, 2011. "The future of the Arab uprisings: The US, with its allies, has already begun plans to subvert the Arab Spring to save its own regional hegemony."
<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/05/201151885013738898.html>
 (Accessed on August 2, 2012).
- Mbembe, Achille. Winter 2003. "Necropolitics." *Public Culture* 15:1, pp. 11-40.
- Mignolo, Walter. 2011. *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. Duke University Press.
- Mitchell, Timothy. 1988. *Colonizing Egypt*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: California University Press.
- New York Times. February 16, 2011. "Shy US Intellectual Created Playbook used in a Revolution." http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/17/world/middleeast/17sharp.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all (Accessed August 1, 2012).
- Nigam, Aditya. 2012. "The Arab upsurge and the "viral" revolutions of our times." *Interface: a journal for and about social movements*. Vol. 4, No1, May, pp.165-177.
<http://www.interfacejournal.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Issue-4-1-Full-PDF.pdf>
- Prashad, Vijay. 2012. "Dream history of the global South." *Interface: a journal for and about social movements*. Vol. 4, No1, May, pp. 43 – 53.
<http://www.interfacejournal.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Issue-4-1-Full-PDF.pdf>
- Peacenews.info. May 28, 2011. "Revolutionary Homework."
<http://peacenews.info/node/6197/revolutionary-homework> (Accessed August 2, 2012).
- Said, Edward. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.

- Salaita, Steven. 2012. "Corporate American media coverage of Arab revolutions: the contradictory messages of modernity." *Interface: a journal for and about social movements*. Vol. 4, No1, May, pp131-145.
<http://www.interfacejournal.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Issue-4-1-Full-PDF.pdf>
- Salt, Jeremy. 2012. "Containing the 'Arab Spring.'" *Interface: a journal for and about social movements*. Vol. 4, No1, May, pp. 54 – 66.
<http://www.interfacejournal.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Issue-4-1-Full-PDF.pdf>
2008. *The Unmaking of the Middle East: A History of Western Disorder in Arab Lands*. University of California Press.
- Shahshahani, Azadeh, and Corinna Mullin. 2012. "The legacy of US intervention and the Tunisian revolution: promises and challenges one year on." Vol. 4, No1, May, pp. 67 – 101.
<http://www.interfacejournal.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Issue-4-1-Full-PDF.pdf>
- Wallerstein, Immanuel. February. 1, 2011. "The Second Arab Revolt: Winners and Losers." *Commentary* No. 298. <http://www.iwallerstein.com/the-second-arab-revolt-winners-and-losers/> (Accessed on July 15, 2012).