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Revolution in an age of polycrisis

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Research Article

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Abstract

Non-technical summary. This study combines revolutionary theory with emerging polycrisis discourses to show how various international and national factors and events can become intertwined, creating polycrisis events that can lead to revolutionary moments. Revolutionary moments can further contribute to stresses that cause polycrisis or systemic dysfunction elsewhere, due to our entanglement of global systems. Through the help of two case studies, the Young Turk Revolution and the Arab Spring, this study highlights how revolutions emerge and how they can unfold in the future.

Technical summary. Revolutions – the overthrow or unseating of governmental forces through mass mobilization – have played a crucial role in major societal transformations throughout history (Lawson, 2019, *Anatomies of revolution*; Goldstone, 2014, Revolutions: A very short introduction). One component of revolutionary theory, past and present, are the ways different factors and forces interact to create revolutionary moments, specifically how international/transnational and internal societal events interconnect to generate revolutionary situations, trajectories, and outcomes. Revolutionary theorist George Lawson (2019) notes that global networks are intermeshed in that they can produce multiple, complex stressors and triggers that cause revolution in what he terms an 'inter-social approach'. Building on these insights, we argue here through the case studies of the Young Turk Revolution and Arab Spring that the conceptualization of polycrisis as a causal entanglement of crises in multiple global systems provides a critical lens to understand revolutions.

Social media summary. In an age of polycrisis, risk of revolution increases. Explore how revolutions form and learn their future paths.

1. Introduction: integrating revolutionary theory with polycrisis

Generally, the study of revolutionary theory has maintained that revolutions arise from an interwoven set of conditions that push society out of an equilibrium into a volatile state (Goldstone, 2014; Lawson, 2019). Revolution is often defined as a 'forceful overthrow of a government through mass mobilization in the name of social justice, to create new political institutions' (Goldstone, 2014, p. 4). For a revolution to take place, revolutionary scholars have named five situations that must appear: (1) economic and fiscal constraints on state capacity, (2) growing alienation and opposition among the elites, (3) increasing widespread popular anger at inequalities and perceived injustice, (4) the bridging of popular and elite grievances against the state, and (5) favorable international conditions (Goldstone, 2014, p. 16). Importantly, George Lawson argues that the durability and continuity of revolutionary occurrences arises from their capacity to adapt throughout time and across spatial boundaries. Furthermore, although there are clear consistencies in how and when revolutions form, they are, however, each historically distinct and gain significance through the unique ordering of events and motivations involved. Therefore, revolution should not be thought as a conceptual entity removed from historical context, 'but one that is forged and reforged in history' (Lawson, 2019, p. 54). This is not meant to imply that revolutions can or should be reduced to a series of predictable substantialist features, but rather it is crucial to illuminate the patterns that revolutions display and similarly acknowledge their historical context and the specific sequence of events and chains of causation.

A core feature of the current 'fourth generation' theories of revolution acknowledge the international influences and factors that drive societal disequilibrium while also recognizing the importance of internal national crises – highlighting unrest from poor economic conditions and social injustices along with frustration and alienation among elite and general populations (Goldstone et al., 2022, p. 55). John Foran, for instance, spotlights two international features that lead to revolution: dependent development and 'world-systemic opening'. The former highlights how core (Global North) and peripheral (Global South) economies are intermeshed and that peripheral economies at times develop rapidly through global trade but their integration into the global economy can also saddle them with debt and inflation causing growing inequality – and with it, rising frustration and anger. 'World-systemic openings' may occur when an equilibrium is disrupted through economic disturbances in core economies, rivalries between powers, or war which impacts peripheral states leading to

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insurrectionary moments (Foran, 2005, pp. 19–23; Lawson, 2019, pp. 67–68). Revolutionary wave theorists further appreciate the importance of international/transnational multi-systemic and cross-scale drivers that can produce 'waves' or 'series of revolutionary events that occur close in time in different (often neighboring) societies, moreover these events are cause for each other or have common causes [for instance, the American Revolution 1775–1783 and its influence on the French Revolution 1789–1799]' (Rozov, 2022, p. 241; also see Goldstone, 2001). According to Rozov, the connections between transnational waves of revolution can be proliferated broadly through five linkages: direct emotional effect, induction (through training and dialogue), ideological influence (connections of slogans and models of organizing), military participation, and common structural causes (socio-economic, demographic, etc.) (2022, pp. 244–245). However, these linkages do not act by themselves but interconnect with the structural weaknesses of a particular nation, be it from a combination of internal economic/scarcity issues, ineffective and or oppressive government, elite competition, and mass dissatisfaction and anger with the government (Rozov, 2022, pp. 251–252). Therefore, the international and domestic factors filter into, and play off one another causing destabilizing effects. They are, in other words, deeply 'causally entangled'.

Building on these above concepts while also theorizing his own conceptualization of revolution, Lawson notes that global networks are intermeshed such that they can produce multiple, complex stressors and triggers that cause revolution. Lawson advocates for an inter-social approach which 'builds from this understanding of the generative role of transboundary entanglements […] in which relations between people, networks, and states drive revolutionary dynamics'. As Lawson comments 'An inter-social approach to revolutions starts from a simple premise: events that take place in one location are both affected and affect events elsewhere' (2019, p. 69). Moreover, Lawson proposes that all five conditions of revolution (proposed by Goldstone, as noted earlier) should be viewed from this inter-social approach. The inter-social approach therefore underscores the nexus of internal and external forces or causations, be it from 'ideas that cross borders, networks of revolutionary actors, in asymmetrical market interactions and more' that all breathe life into revolutionary moments, trajectories, and outcomes (Lawson, 2019, p. 64). Therefore, it is the transboundary inter-social webs that ignite revolutionary dynamics.

Largely separate from theoretical and empirical research on revolutions, scholars from across a wide number of fields have developed the concept of polycrisis (see Lawrence et al., 2024; Søgaard Jørgensen et al., 2023). Similar to Lawson's understandings of revolution, the polycrisis concept stresses the importance of causal entanglement across different systems, which may operate at different scales and timeframes. Furthermore, polycrisis critically links different types of systems, noting how interactions between economic, environmental, socio-political, and any number of other characteristics of societies may impact each other in complex feedback loops. One of the insights arising from research on polycrisis is that we are currently experiencing deep – and increasing – global cross-systemic risk arising from the combination of earth system stress, growing inequality and social injustices, economic and ecological shocks, food system distress, and political polarization and dysfunction (see Homer-Dixon, 2023; Lawrence et al., 2024; Learner, 2023; Tooze, 2022). We argue that the conceptualization of polycrisis as a 'causal entanglement of crises in multiple global systems' (Lawrence et al., 2024) holds a great deal of promise to be able to help uncover the different forces that create revolutionary situations, factors largely overlooked in typical approaches to revolution which often seek to hone in on only one or two key 'drivers' for each historical moment.

We argue that the conceptualization of polycrisis as a 'causal entanglement of crises in multiple global systems' captures Lawson's concept perfectly (Lawrence et al., 2024). Polycrisis' emphasis on understanding both *intra-system impacts* – in which a disruption can affect one part or area of a single system and spread to the entire system – along with *inter-system impacts* – the disruption of the initial system may spill outside systems boundaries and disrupt other systems – provide useful frameworks in charting how revolutionary situations develop and unfold over time, in line with Lawson's articulation of inter-social webs. Furthermore, the emphasis is on periods when multiple systems enter a state of crisis; namely, growing stress coupled with triggering events puts these systems at high risk of dysfunction, with often devastating results (Mark et al., forthcoming). For instance, interdependencies precipitated growing vulnerability within the global financial system, which combined with stresses from highly leveraged asset markets 'triggering events', such as major bankruptcies of banking firms, leading to failures in the financial sector during the 2007–2009 global financial crisis. This impacted other systems from employment and income, food, housing security, and political functions (Lawrence et al., 2024). As we will see below, this polycrisis is also implicated in the revolutionary moments of the Arab Spring.

Revolutions, in our view, are best understood as outcomes or manifestations of multiple crises and/or polycrisis. At the same time, however, the outcomes and events that occur within and after revolutionary moments themselves can often further contribute to the stresses that comprise a polycrisis situation or cause systemic dysfunction elsewhere. Given that the conditions – stresses and triggering events, deep entanglement among systems – that comprise a polycrisis are still present today, the risks of such cascading, mutually reinforcing, multi-sector crises remain high; so too, therefore, do the prospects of such crisis spiraling into further revolutionary situations, along with the prospect that revolutions that may arise will feedback into the same polycrisis conditions that lead to their eruption in the first place. Yet, to date there has been insufficient research on how and why revolutions occur within complex, polycrisis-type periods, nor on what conditions allow revolutions to 'succeed' in bringing about deep, adaptive transformation that can increase well-being and reduce social injustices for subsequent generations.

Seen in this light, understanding the interaction or embeddedness of revolution within a polycrisis framework becomes a critical task for scholars. Here, we seek to begin to develop a method to pursue exactly this type of research. Namely, we trace how a polycrisis approach helps to reveal the onset of revolutionary situations (how and why revolutions occur), their trajectories (how revolutions unfold), and their outcomes (what occurs in the aftermath of revolutions). Bringing ideas from polycrisis theory to bear on historical events can not only reveal aspects of the past previously underappreciated but can also generate insights about what we might expect as our modern global polycrisis continues to deepen. Here, we offer an initial attempt at doing this, describing two significant historical revolutions to illustrate the utility of such an approach. In the sections that follow, we begin by spotlighting two important revolutionary moments from the last 125 years – under the Ottoman Empire

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in 1908–1909 and the Arab Spring movements of 2011 – to illustrate how polycrisis and the stressors that exist across systems within a revolution are inexorably linked. The Young Turk Revolution and the Arab Spring cases were chosen based on data availability and the authors' expertise in these areas, as well as due to the many parallels between them; just over 100 years apart and within a corresponding geographical region, both examples faced similar multi-systemic crises in their counties' economic, social, and political spheres in the lead up to their revolutionary moments. Both case studies, therefore, address how revolutions benefit from a polycrisis framework to better understand its impact on social unrest. Furthermore, these case examples contribute to a polycrisis discourse by outlining how revolutions emerge from a host of intermeshed forces and disruptions across systems at multiple spatial and temporal levels, while at the same time showing that even locally constrained and focused revolutionary actions can have widespread ripple effects across systems and even political borders. Overall, our study helps expose the drivers and consequences of revolutions, covering historical and more contemporary examples, to the ways that revolution may unfold in the years ahead.

2. The Young Turk Revolution

In the early days of July 1908, two young high-ranking officers in the Third Army Corps of Macedonia, İsmail Enver and Ahmed Niyazi, openly rebelled against Sultan Abdülhamid II to demand the reinstitution of the Ottoman Constitution and the parliament (Chamber of Deputies) that had been disbanded by the Sultan in 1878. Both Enver and Niyazi were part of the secretive political organization the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) or more famously known as the Young Turks. The CUP's aims varied between members, but its core principles advocated for the restoration of the constitution and the parliament, uphold a unified Ottoman Empire that gave rights to all its inhabitants despite religion or ethnicity, halt foreign meddling and the disintegration of the empire by European and nationalist actors, and end the authoritarian and corrupt governmental practices associated with Sultan Abdülhamid (Sohrabi, 2011, pp. 99–116).

Niyazi and Enver led rebellious soldiers into the Macedonia hills, recruiting Albanian, Bulgarian, Greek, Muslim, and Macedonian Slav villages to join in the revolution (Glenny, 2012, p. 215; Sohrabi, 2011, p. 198). The revolutionary movement spread from Ottoman Macedonia to Ottoman Kosovo particularly in the cities of Monastir, Salonica, and Skopje. Similarly, the Second Army Corps stationed in Thrace also openly aligned itself with the Young Turk Revolution. Revolutionaries destroyed Ottoman garrisons and seized their munitions. Widespread threats and killings of military officials loyal to the government and Sultan prompted many to join the revolution in fear of retribution (Glenny, 2012, p. 215; Sohrabi, 2011, p. 115). By the 23rd of July, the Porte (government) and more importantly the Sultan were given a deadline to restore the constitution and the parliament, or else the Third Army and its associated revolutionaries would march to İstanbul (Sohrabi, 2011, pp. 117–127). Between the night of the 23rd and the early morning of the 24th, Sultan Abdülhamid, without choice, announced the reinstitution of the constitution and the parliament (Glenny, 2012, pp. 215–216; Sohrabi, 2011, p. 127). Cutting through the religious and ethnic divides, Jews, Greeks, Bulgarians, Albanians, and Muslims celebrated together chanting the CUP's borrowed slogan from the French Revolution: 'Liberité, Égalité and Fraternité', in a short-lived moment of harmony between the heterogeneous mix of inhabitants within the Ottoman Empire (Mazower, 2006, p. 257).

The Young Turk Revolution erupted in an age of regional European and Ottoman polycrises brought on by European wars, expansionism and interference in Ottoman affairs, the rise of nationalism of smaller nation states neighboring the empire, Ottoman economic instability, corruption of the Ottoman government, growing anger and dissatisfaction within a young male middle class, and religious/ethnic divisions between Ottoman inhabitants all interacting together to become a pressure cooker leading to the constitutional Young Turk Revolution of 1908. With a counterrevolution to follow in 1909, the Young Turk Revolution created shock waves, accelerating new crises in the Balkans which, eventually, ended up contributing substantially to the outbreak of World War I. These events underscore our argument that revolutions are outcomes of polycrisis and can also contribute to stresses that further cause polycrisis situations.

2.1 European crises, rivalries, and the calculated death of the Sick Man

The long nineteenth century saw various European crises erupting into regional wars as European empires were eager to expand their territory and dominance. This gave rise to unpredictable and shifting alliances between the so-called 'Great Powers' of Europe which included Britain, France, Russia, Germany, and Austria-Hungary. Each country had its own foreign policy agenda and desired to expand its influence particularly in the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean areas that were under the tutelage of the declining Ottoman Empire, known pejoratively as the Sick Man of Europe. In the decades leading up to World War I, tenuous alliance systems formed and became more pronounced on the one side with Britain, Russia, and France and on the other Germany and Austria-Hungary. It is important to mention that these alliances were merely strategic and more cooperations of convenience, a foreign policy house of cards. Russia, for instance, had an agenda that coveted Constantinople as its own capital with access to the Dardanelles leading from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, a policy that rivaled Britain's strategy to dominate the Eastern Mediterranean and its sea route to India via the Suez. Russia also promoted a panslavic Orthodox program in the Ottoman Balkans sending money and agents to stoke Slavic nationalist aspirations in the hopes of becoming the dominant political actor in the East (Marriott, 1940, p. 229). Austria-Hungary, a landlocked empire, also interfered in the sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire as it was eager to expand its territory in the Balkans and establish strategic access to the Mediterranean, acting as the main rival to Russia (Clayton, 1971, pp. 166–167).

After the Ottoman defeat in the Russo–Turkish War of 1878, the Great Powers at the Congress of Berlin made territorial secessions at the expense of the empire. Austria-Hungary was allowed to occupy Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Sanjak of Novi Pazar, but eventually annexed the entire region after the Young Turk Revolution of 1908. Bulgaria was split between two distinct units: one a sovereign Bulgarian principality and the other an autonomous Bulgarian region within the Ottoman Empire called Eastern Rumelia (until 1885 when it was annexed by Bulgaria). The Congress of Berlin also allowed for the creation of the new independent nations of Serbia, Montenegro, and Romania (Marriott, 1940, pp. 135–143). Greece was also given small portions of territory in Epirus and Thessaly and Russia gained the

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Ottoman territory of Bessarabia. The Congress of Berlin was a huge humiliation for Sultan Abdülhamid and the Ottoman Empire in general, causing lasting resentment from segments of the Ottoman population that felt Abdülhamid had allowed the vultures of Europe to pick apart limb by limb the corpse of the empire (Glenny, 2012, pp. 146–147).

More importantly, the Congress of Berlin brought to the fore the question over Macedonia, the last major Ottoman province in Europe. The population of Ottoman Macedonia was diverse with Macedonian and Bulgarian Slavs, Jews, Greeks, Albanians, and Vlachs. With the rise of nationalism and the creation of new independent neighboring states, Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria, and to some extent Albanian nationalists all sought irredentist claims over the region creating a hostile and violent environment (Glenny, 2012, pp. 154–160; Mazower, 2006, pp. 238–242). Religion took an equally important role in the conflict over Ottoman Macedonia as it was a vehicle for nationalist education and bonds with groups outside official nation states. For instance, the Greek nationalist committee, *Ethniki Etairia* (National Assembly), frequently sent priests and teachers to villages in Ottoman Macedonia to promote a Greek national cause (Tatsios, 1984, pp. 45–46). Similarly, with the creation and recognition of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in 1870, Bulgarian nationalist actors similarly sent their own priests and teachers to compete with Greek agendas, thus creating a bitter rivalry between the two groups (Tatsios, 1984, pp. 45–46; also see Glenny, 2012, pp. 193–200). Bulgarian guerrilla groups or *četa*, notably, roamed the Macedonian countryside persuading villages through terror to join their cause and extort money from various communities to support their nationalist programs. Those who did not comply were often killed (Glenny, 2012, p. 197). The breakdown of order in Ottoman Macedonia was particularly damaging to local populations swept up in irredentist rivalries with an ill-equipped and underpaid Ottoman army unable to protect them, underscoring the dysfunctional nature of the Ottoman military and ultimately the failings of the Ottoman government.

2.2 The Ottoman Empire in an age of polycrisis and the lead up to revolution

The nineteenth century was a time of great change within the Ottoman Empire. Starting with Sultan Mahmud II (1808–1839) who paved the way for the modernization of the empire by introducing compulsory primary education, the establishment of medical schools, and opportunities for Ottoman officials to attend European universities. Mahmud II's successors would continue with these modernizing reforms through a series of edicts known as the *Tanzimat* (Reorganization). These included three critical reforms. First was the granting of equal rights to all Ottoman subjects despite religion or ethnicity. The second change reorganized the Ottoman legal system 'which was distinct from that of the Islamic sharia administered by the qadis or Islamic judges' (Mansfield, 2013, p. 72). Third was a modernizing of the Ottoman military in line with European standard with a push to raise the educational standards within the armed forces (Mansfield, 2013, p. 73). These reforms, particularly granting equality to all Ottoman citizens, radically changed the structure of the empire since its inhabitants were not organized under ethnicity but rather religion under the *millet* system. Within the *millet* system, different non-Muslim communities were organized in Orthodox, Armenian (Gregorian), Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant categories and were given broad autonomy to deal with their own religious and communal affairs. In exchange for this autonomy, the non-Muslims were made to pay a special religious tax called the *jiyza* in exchange for the government's protection. With the transformations brought on with the *Tanzimat*, the *jiyza* was officially abolished in 1856. Similarly, the creation of new legal reforms opened the way for secularization, slowly eroding the Islamic Sharia and Muslim supremacy in the empire (Tatsios, 1984, pp. 7–8).

Compounding the slow decline of Muslim dominance within the Empire was the opening of European market systems and tumultuous economic conditions that further added strain to Ottoman governance. By 1838, free market trade with Europe inundated the empire, often creating huge gains for the merchant classes who were predominately Orthodox, Armenian, and Jewish Ottoman subjects. These communities often disproportionally prospered from European market influence and 'capitulations' which were economic agreements between the Ottoman Empire and European nationals who were granted tax privileges. Increasingly, various governments were giving European citizenship to Ottoman minorities who also benefited from tax incentives, increasing resentment between Muslims against the Ottoman religious minorities (Hale, 2000, p. 14). To keep up with modernization akin to Western European standards and to bring down inflation rates, the Ottoman Empire had to borrow money at high interest such as its 1851 loan from British and French banks for 55 million francs (Mansfield, 2013, p. 74). In 1875, the financial crisis came to a head. Sohrabi mentions by that time more loans were taken out but 'most loans went toward servicing the debt, absorbing up to 80 percent of the yearly state revenue' (2011, p. 37). During that year the Ottoman budget deficit grew and the Empire was not able to payback its loans.

The deficit increased as the Ottoman Empire, a predominantly agrarian empire, faced a series of severe droughts which resulted in failed harvests, and also uprisings in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Bulgaria, and a war with Russia caused large military spending ultimately leading to the monetary shortfall (Mansfield, 2013, p. 89; Sohrabi, 2011, p. 38). As a result of the deficit, the Ottoman government declared bankruptcy that same year, 1875. Unacceptable to European creditors and states, in 1881 Sultan Abdülhamid allowed six European nations to create what has been dubbed 'a semicolonial financial administration' called the Public Debt Administration (PDA). This administration was set up to protect the investments of European creditors by collecting Ottoman revenue which would then be used to pay back previous loans (Sohrabi, 2011, p. 38). Sohrabi explains that the PDA was able to interfere in the empire's sovereignty over budgetary expenditures and eventually controlled a third of the Ottoman Empire's revenue and became more influential than the Ottoman Ministry of Finance (2011, p. 38). Although much of the Ottoman government revenues went to paying off foreign debt, this was at the expense of state officials and the military who were irregularly paid and often resorted, out of desperation, to taking their government payment slips to black market dealers who would pay these individuals at lower rates adding to larger discontent (Sohrabi, 2011, p. 83).

During the Ottoman age of reform, growing dissatisfaction among the bourgeois classes emerged marking the first constitutional movement from 1865–1878. This group was known as the Young Ottomans and was the predecessor of the Young Turk movement. Similar to the Young Turks, the Young Ottomans believed in Ottomanism as a solution to stop European meddling and the fueling of nationalism within the non-Muslim

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communities. Ottomanism would establish citizenship based on Ottoman territorial unity which granted equality to all under the empire, a counterweight to the religious and ethnic solidarities that undermined Ottoman cohesion. The Young Ottomans also advocated for a representative government under the creation of a constitution and parliament. The movement gained traction which led to the successful coup against Sultan Abdülaziz in 1876 who was eventually replaced by Sultan Abdülhamid II. Coming to power, Abdülhamid agreed to the first Ottoman constitution and creation of a parliament; this was short-lived however, as he suspended the constitution and dismissed parliament in 1878 (Sohrabi, 2011, pp. 39–45; also see Mansfield, 2013, p. 81).

Sultan Abdülhamid consolidated his power through an autocratic regime promoting Islamic unity under his title of Caliph. Secretive and paranoid, he shifted political power away from the Ottoman Porte to the Palace. During his reign, the Sultan granted high positions and salary increases to those loyal to him in government and the military (Mansfield, 2013, p. 86; Sohrabi, 2011, p. 51). These high-ranking military and government officials faithful to Abdülhamid were granted favorable positions through patrimonialist systems without merit or the educational training to warrant such promotions. Similarly, Abdülhamid created vast spy networks within the military and government as a way of monitoring loyalty. The advancements and salary raises to meritless individuals in the government was a stark contrast to the harsh financial realities the majority of the empire's subjects faced, as people were often paid in arrears and encountered arbitrarily high taxes (Sohrabi, 2011, pp. 51–52).

Growing out of this environment was swelling resentment from young middle class Ottoman military students and officers who were highly educated through *Tanzimat* reforms. Upset over blocked upward mobility and the promotions of uneducated or unskilled individuals as their superiors, students of the Royal Military Medical Academy created the secretive organization the Ottoman Union Society in 1881. Unsurprisingly, Jack Goldstone has argued that revolutionary moments are often accompanied by an increase of young populations with high levels of education who are pursuing paths of mobility but are thwarted by governmental authorities who clog these pathways, only allowing a relative few to move upward (2002, p. 10). More interesting is the claim by Weber (2013) and Cincotta (2008) (also see Korotayev et al., 2022a, 2022b), that along with increased political violence, the rise of youth populations that are predominantly male might also correlate to 'failed democratic transitions' or higher rates of political repression which could explain the growing rate of authoritarianism by the CUP after the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 and the counterrevolution of 1909 (Korotayev et al., 2022a, p. 4, 2022b).

The grievances spread throughout the military institutions, schools, and immigrant communities outside the empire, particularly in Paris. In 1894, an official opposition party emerged with its leader Ahmed Riza thus establishing the CUP (Sohrabi, 2011, p. 54). By the turn of the twentieth century the CUP had secret party affiliates throughout Europe, Istanbul, and some Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire (Sohrabi, 2011, p. 58). Eventually, with monetary assistance from the CUP Paris office, a powerful Salonika/Macedonian branch emerged. Leading up to the July 1908 revolution and emphasizing the transboundary and intersocial nature of revolutionary movements, the CUP were greatly inspired by a wave of revolutionary moments in Russia and Iran that would eventually lead to further revolutionary waves in China (1911–1915) and Mexico (1910–1917) (Grinin et al., 2022, p. 6). In 1905, the Russian masses rallied against the despotism of the Tsar, a comparison the CUP were eager to make with their own despotic Sultan (Sohrabi, 2011, pp. 78–79). Similarly, the constitutional revolution of Iran in 1906 also sparked hope among the CUP members for their own revolutionary aims as citizens of another Islamic nation paved the way for governmental representation (Sohrabi, 2011, p. 83). The revolutionary momentum for the CUP reached its apex however, with two trigger events in the early months of 1908 when an Ottoman military commander loyal to the Sultan uncovered the CUP organization in Macedonia and the secret meeting at Reval (Tallinn) between Russia and the United Kingdom on a possible plan to break up Ottoman Macedonia, thus kicking into gear the successful July CUP revolution led by Enver and Niyazi (Glenny, 2012, p. 215; Mansfield, 2013, p. 142; Sohrabi, 2011, pp. 99–101).

2.3 The long-term impacts of revolution and its creation of further crisis: from counterrevolution and the Balkan wars to World War I

After the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 with the reinstitution of the constitution and the opening of the parliamentary assembly, the CUP political party became virtually a state within a state working behind the scenes to enact political transformations (Sohrabi, 2011; Zürcher, 2014, p. 75). One of the major changes brought forward by the CUP were purges within the military and in administrative areas. These purges were particularly aimed at removing or demoting ranked officials who had achieved promotions out of the old patrimonialist systems and did not have the educational training to support their titles. These forced removals and demotions not only affected high ranked bureaucrats and military officers, but also the lower ranked officials (Clayer, 2017, pp. 140–141; Sohrabi, 2011, pp. 189–190). The revolution had marked a major shift from what were viewed by the CUP as corrupt and antiquated Ottoman systems of the past toward one of modernization through education and the promotion of secular ideals and governance. The secularization of the Ottoman Empire founded on Westernized models further alienated Muslim groups in the empire who viewed this transformation as an additional withering away of Muslim privileges and Sharia foundations (Georgeon, 2017, pp. 181–185; Sohrabi, 2011, p. 224; Zürcher, 2014, p. 76). Moreover, certain segments of the Muslim population regarded these revolutionary changes as supporting Ottoman minorities who were becoming more economically privileged. The main Islamist political opponent to the CUP was a group called the Society of Muhammad under the leadership of Dervish Vahdeti who argued for the supremacy of Sharia in the empire. Merging with the Society of Muhammad were low ranking officers who were either demoted or claimed to be persecuted by the educated officers who had risen in power after the revolution (Sohrabi, 2011, p. 225; Zürcher, 2014, p. 76). These two forces therefore joined to create the counterrevolution of 1909.

Beginning on April 13th, 1909, and lasting 9 days, the counterrevolution began when mutinous soldiers stationed in İstanbul revolted against their officers by arresting and in some cases killing them and inciting other soldiers to join (Sohrabi, 2011, pp. 236–237). The soldiers were then accompanied by religious segments who also participated. The counterrevolution demanded the removal of the members of the General Assembly to be replaced by new representatives and required

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that officials fired in the purges be reinstated both wishes granted by Sultan Abdülhamid who benefited from the counterrevolution (Sohrabi, 2011, p. 240; Zürcher, 2014, pp. 77–80). The counterrevolution also had devastating effects in which Ottoman Armenians in the province of Adana were violently massacred by Muslim reactionaries killing around 20,000 people (Rodogno, 2012, p. 202). In little over a week, the counterrevolution was quickly crushed by the CUP who had regrouped and took control of the capital. The CUP restored the dismissed General Assembly, severely punished the perpetrators, and deposed of Sultan Abdülhamid and replaced him with his brother Sultan Mehmet Reşad V, effectively a puppet for the CUP (Sohrabi, 2011, p. 255).

In the wake of the counterrevolution, the CUP became a repressive force declaring martial law, press restrictions particularly for opposition publications, and laws against suspicious individuals who endangered the empire. A crucial legal proceeding out of this period was a bill that limited public gatherings with an important article that prohibited the creation of political groups based on ethnic identities, which was clearly aimed at nationalist parties within the empire and state actors working from the outside, a clear nod to networks in Macedonia (Lévy-Aksu, 2017, pp. 218–219 and 223–224; Sohrabi, 2011, pp. 263–265). As a consequence of the counterrevolution, the CUP similarly embarked on a strict form of nationalism away from the Ottomanism of the past to a new Turkification that highlighted the supremacy of Turkish culture, excluding other Ottoman Muslim groups in the process (such as the Albanian and Arab Muslims who were also revolting for autonomy) and, similarly, non-Muslim elements. Similarly, this Turkification also led to the resurgence of nationalist networks in Ottoman Macedonia who initially fought for the Young Turk Revolution but felt betrayed as the CUP's promise of equality for all became increasingly sidelined (Mazower, 2006, pp. 263–264).

Occurring in parallel, in the months preceding the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, after Austria-Hungary annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina, Russia decided to embark on a new foreign policy that encouraged the Balkan nation states and nationalist actors to create a Balkan alliance system to thwart Austrian-Hungarian expansion in the region (Glenny, 2012, pp. 224–226). The Balkan states of Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Montenegro also had their own political agendas one of territorial claims in Macedonia and ending Ottoman rule in Europe. Russia was a key instrument bringing these states together over territorial disagreements and helped negotiate and draw new land boundaries in Macedonia (Glenny, 2012, p. 226). Excluded from this Balkan alliance was Albania, who was still under the Ottoman Empire, but because of increasing cultural suppression under the CUP's Turkification program, demanded its own autonomy. Worried over Montenegro, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Greece's claims to Macedonia, which excluded Albania's interests, Albanian nationalists revolted against the Ottoman Empire in late 1912, marching successfully to occupy Skopje (Glenny, 2012, pp. 227–228). The easy defeat of the Ottoman troops by the Albanian nationalists emboldened the Balkan alliance to strike, unleashing the First Balkan War. Fighting a four-pronged war, the Ottoman military was swiftly defeated in 6 weeks, ending its 500-year rule in the Balkans (Mazower, 2006, p. 276). The territorial gains won in the First Balkan War quickly led to acrimonious in-fighting, particularly between Bulgaria versus the remaining Balkan alliance members, which precipitated the Second Balkan War of 1913, lasting less than a month. The devastation from both wars was acute with over 200,000 combatants killed and even more dying from outbreaks of diseases that spread from these brutal conditions (Glenny, 2012, p. 229).

Nationalist claims still lingered after the Balkan wars particularly between Serbia and Austria-Hungary, which occupied Bosnia-Herzegovina. There was a significant portion of ethnic Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and with the aid of the Serbian nationalist group the Black Hand (with links to the Serbian military and aided by Russia), the Serb Bosnians created the separatist group named Young Bosnia. On the 28 of June 1914, in Sarajevo, Young Bosnia conspirators assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austrian-Hungarian throne (Glenny, 2012, pp. 298–300). Setting off the Great Power Alliance system, Austria-Hungary prepared to attack Serbia which was allied to Russia who prepared for mobilization. This then triggered German, French, and British involvement. The enmeshing of geopolitical and economic interests and the network of treaties that had developed through the nineteenth century, working to create the polycrisis environment which had in many ways spawned the Young Turk movement, was thus further deepened in the revolutionary aftermath, ultimately leading to World War I.

3. The Arab Spring

In the Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid on the morning of December 17, 2010, Mohamed Bouazizi, a street vendor, who was working without a permit, had his scales and produce confiscated by local police. Bouazizi was routinely harassed by the police who would extort him via cuts on his daily earnings or would take away his produce. Desperate, Bouazizi went to the local government building to complain to the governor who refused to see him. As a result of the frustration due to constant corruption and the precariousness of daily life as a main earner for his family, Bouazizi set himself on fire in a last act of defiance. Bouazizi's self-immolation caused protests in Sidi Bouzid whose citizens demanded a response from the local governor (Lageman, 2020). These events were filmed and were spread by social media and international news agencies such as Al Jazeera, leading to larger protests throughout Tunisia in which protestors were angered by the corruption, high unemployment rate and repression by the Zine El Abidine Ben Ali regime. By January 14, 2011, the government of Ben Ali fell.

Emboldened by the protests and downfall of Ben Ali, activists and many young, working-class people in Egypt who were also enraged at the rise of food prices that had doubled from 2007 to 2011 (Food Price Shocks in Egypt, n.d.), high levels of inequality, unemployment, and the oppressive nature of Hosni Mubarak's government, occupied Cairo's Tahrir Square on January 25th. By the 28th of January fractures in the Egyptian military, who were sent to break up the protests in Tahrir Square, started to form as soldiers refused to harm protestors. After weeks of refusing to step down from power the Egyptian military removed Mubarak from office on February 11th (Goldstone, 2014, pp. 120–123).

Spreading rapidly, other protests voicing similar demands against personalist regimes erupted throughout North Africa and the Middle East in Yemen, Libya, Syria, and Bahrain, altogether dubbed the Arab Spring. The origins and causes of the Arab Spring were diverse across these different countries, but patterns and similarities have emerged as all were rallying against crony capitalism, growing gaps in wealth, high food prices, and repressive regimes. Similarly, if we look further, we can

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witness these stressors exacerbated by polycrisis which led to, and then was further deepened from, the 2007–2008 financial crisis and resulting global recession. The financial crisis acted as a major pressure point, which ultimately culminated in the self-immolation of Bouazizi, the trigger of the revolution. Compounding the global economic downturn, another feature of the era's polycrisis was anthropogenic-induced climate change, which put further strain on vulnerable Middle Eastern nations' systems. At the same time, speculation in food/energy prices, poor agricultural policies, and a growing youth dissatisfied with the lack of opportunities converged to create fertile ground for mass grievances resulting in the Arab Spring. The revolutions of the Arab Spring have also deepened the polycrisis situation as its ramifications are still felt presently.

3.1 The bubble bursts: the financial crisis – a global polycrisis

The 2007–2008 financial crisis originated from the decline of the US housing market, but in a world of entangled economic systems it's not surprising that collapse in one sphere permeated to other global financial systems, eventually putting pressure on socio-economic and political stability in various countries around the world. This was argued in Thomas Homer-Dixon et al.'s analysis of causal frameworks surrounding global crises, where long and slow accumulations of simultaneous stresses in one system can produce 'ramifying cascades' to other network areas (2015, p. 4). Homer-Dixon and collaborators contended that the 2008 financial collapse was causally linked with the 2008 energy crises which was also inter-systemically intertwined with the global food crisis during the same period, exhibiting the hallmarks of what they call a 'synchronous failure' (2015, pp. 5–10); in other words, clearly manifestations as well as drivers of our modern polycrisis. As seen below, we highlight in detail, these multi-systemic synchronous failures to reveal their effect on the Middle East and North Africa.

When the financial crisis spread globally, many economic and political pundits argued that the crisis would have limited impact on the Middle East. The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace made an assessment in late 2009 that 'Countries across the Middle East and North Africa have weathered the Great Recession relatively well, despite steep declines in oil prices'. Although mentioning that improvements in non-oil-producing countries in the region would be lagging, they did offer a hypothetical warning if growth continued at a slow pace.

> The economic crisis will also have social and political consequences across the region, though the effects will likely be delayed. Strong economic growth has long been the lone safety valve for easing social unrest under the current regimes. If growth remains sluggish, political pressure will mount on the current leadership, slowly eroding their political capital (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2009).

Despite this caution, most experts were not expecting a movement such as the Arab Spring to sweep through North Africa and the Middle East. In fact, both Tunisia and Egypt were presented as positive economic exemplars in the region (Al-Shamahi, 2020; Heydarian, 2021, p. 67). As authors Shalendra Sharma (2010) and Richard Javad Heydarian (2021) have both argued, analysists naively thought that the financial crisis would make little dint in the Middle East and North Africa because the oil-rich countries would have enough cash reserves to thwart any crisis and that non-oil-producing countries in the region were minimally integrated into the global financial market, shielding them from shocks (Sharma, 2010, pp. 38–39). Similarly, experts failed to understand the integrated structural problems in each country, particularly as many governments in the region had turned to neoliberal policies and privatization years before, leading to growing inequalities and declining social services as we recount below.

In the decades before the Great Recession, many North African and Middle Eastern states such as Egypt and Tunisia, and to an extent Libya and Syria, had moved from being 'Arab Socialist' countries that had some social securities in terms of welfare measures to become integrated into the neoliberal markets where economic sectors became privatized. Similarly, because of this shift in economic policies these countries became reliant on exports 'whereby international trade, FDIs [Foreign Direct Investments], tourism and services became the engine of economic life' (Heydarian, 2021, p. 63). The market-oriented economic reforms pursued by these Arab states were highly encouraged by International Financial Institutions (IFIs) such as the International Monetary Fund and were equally beneficial to authoritarian regimes as they sought aid from these IFIs (Al-Shamahi, 2020). As Paul Mason has remarked, Mubarak's sons 'Gamal and his brother Alaa had built a personal fortune for the family, estimated at around $70 billion, by extracting stakes in the newly privatized enterprises' (2013, pp. 17–18). The economic reforms on paper looked promising with relatively stable growth in GDP, but in actuality these deregulated policies pushed high levels of inequality through crony capitalism, where elites loyal to regimes were given lucrative business deals while large segments of these populations remained unemployed with little assistance to support them. On the cusp of the revolution, Egyptian unemployment was at 28% whereas the overall regional unemployment levels of the Middle East and North African reached almost 25% (Al-Shamahi, 2020; Mason, 2013, p. 19). These efforts to globalize built large amounts of wealth for these countries' leaders, their sycophants, and pleased the international community with shallow economic growth, but as a result of this extreme wealth concentration and defunding of public services, these states became vulnerable to external shocks.

Not only did the financial crisis affect the Middle East, but it affected both the oil-producing nations and the non-oil-producing nations in different ways. For the oil-producing nations, the most obvious impact was the massive decrease in oil prices from 147 dollars per barrel before the crisis to 38.6 dollars per barrel at the end of 2008 (Sharma, 2010, p. 44). For the oil-producing countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) this meant a 38% decline in the GCC countries' GDP and similarly a loss of 350 billion dollars in assets for the GCC's Sovereign Wealth Funds (Sharma, 2010, pp. 44–45). For the oil-rich United Arab Emirates (UAE), the global financial crisis made its economy vulnerable as it was highly integrated in global markets through property development. Dubai in particular had allowed foreign investors to buy and develop properties. When foreign investors started pulling back during the crisis, they also started selling their property and Dubai's property market began to rapidly fall. Eventually the UAE Central Bank stepped in to provide its banking sector with the much-needed liquidity to stay afloat (Heydarian, 2021, pp. 82–83; Sharma, 2010, pp. 44–46).

In the case of the non-oil-producing countries in the Middle East and North Africa, while they were not as integrated in global markets, they were highly intertwined with the oil-producing states through trade and exports. From 2008 to 2009 the GDP growth rates of Egypt and Tunisia dropped from an average of

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6 to 3.6% (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2009). Similarly, countries such as Egypt, Yemen, and Tunisia were highly reliant on foreign development, tourism, and remittances from workers living in the wealthier Gulf states. When the financial crisis affected the oil-producing countries in the Middle East, massive layoffs of emigrant workers commenced to focus on policies that supported their own citizens, thus effecting huge sources of remittance revenues which countries such as Egypt depended on (Heydarian, 2021, pp. 80–83; Sharma, 2010, p. 40). Heydarian also points out that 'The massive downturn in Europe – exacerbated by the sovereign debt crisis among several Eurozone economies – also slashed the non-oil exports of many Arab economies, which heavily depended on merchandise trade with their neighbours across the Mediterranean' (2021, pp. 83–84). Non-oil-producing states were facing a squeeze from both the oil-producing Middle Eastern countries that were becoming more austere in terms of their labor markets and foreign investments and at the same time the Eurozone was cutting back its global trade with places such as Egypt and Tunisia. Therefore, although already facing the effects of privatization at the expense of social services, high rates of unemployment, corruption, and repression, the global financial crisis intensified these issues to their limits for places such as Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya, and Syria. Combining with these effects, many investors after the financial crisis began speculating in food and energy which raised the actual prices of goods. Countries such as Egypt that had privatized much of their industry and cut subsidies to help lower earners had become reliant of food imports whose prices were on the rise (Heydarian, 2021, p. 91).

3.2 Entangled crises: the impact of climate change, youth bulges, and social inequality

Anthropogenic climate change also created sharp price fluctuations for food. From 2007 to 2011, adverse weather made food production more strained as drought gripped wheat production in Russia, China, and Ukraine (ClimateDiplomacy.org). In Syria, poor agricultural management compounded with extended periods of drought became disastrous for the country's political stability. During the almost 30-year reign of Hafez al-Assad, policies that encouraged the increase of agricultural production, fuel subsidies, and irrigation construction were commonplace in Syria. As part of the fertile crescent, Syria's agricultural production depends on annual rainfall through the winter months. Moreover, many farmers in the country use irrigation from canals, but others rely on groundwater supplies for their agricultural needs which over time became overused and diminished (Kelley et al., 2015, p. 3241). When Hafez al-Assad's son Bashar came to power in 2000, Syria, similar to other regimes in the Middle East, shifted its economic policies to international markets and cut food and fuel subsidies which people counted on. During the winter of 2006–2007, Syria experienced the start of an intense 3-year drought. Although there had been droughts consistently throughout the years with the previous event occurring in the late 1990s, the exhaustion of groundwater 'depleted the buffer against the years of low rainfall' and the water supply was not able to rebound to prevent the effects of the current drought (Kelley et al., 2015, p. 3241). Similarly, low rainfall at the sources of the Euphrates and Tigris in Turkey made Syria's drought more severe. Farmers in Syria were unable to cope with the prolonged drought and rising cost of food for their livestock, thus forcing many to quit farming and move to find other areas of employment (Kelley et al., 2015, pp. 3242–3243). As Kelley et al. mentions 'Estimates of the number of people internally displaced by the drought are as high as 1.5 million […] By 2010 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and Iraqi refugees made up roughly 20% of Syria's urban population' (Kelley et al., 2015, p. 3242).

The influx of rural populations coupled with the refugees from neighboring Iraq put massive strains on urban areas and the country's political stability at large with high levels of unemployment, rising crime rates, housing shortages, and rampant corruption from the Assad regime (Kelley et al., 2015, p. 3242). In an interview with Thomas Friedman of the *New York Times*, one young protestor against Assad's regime during the Arab Spring points out

> The best jobs in Hasakah province, Syria's oil-producing region, were with the oil companies, but drought refugees, virtually all of whom were Sunni Muslim, could only dream of getting hired there. 'Most of those jobs went to Alawites […] referring to the minority sect to which President Assad belongs […] It made people even more angry (2013, p. 7).

The lack of social welfare, decades of poor agricultural policies, and extended drought led to food instability and political unrest. It was ultimately the arrest and torture of young teenage boys in the city of Dara'a who graffitied anti-Assad remarks that sparked protests in Damascus and Aleppo, triggering the start of Syria's Arab Spring (Chughtai, 2021; Fahim & Saad, 2013).

In places such as Syria and Egypt, climate change aggravated ongoing social inequalities. This is emphasized by Homer-Dixon's research on scarcity and violence in which he notes that 'structural scarcity', which he defines as unequal distributions in class, politics, and ethnic relations, can in some cases reinforce environmental scarcity (1999, p. 16). This pressure can also lead to different types of conflicts which are underpinned by what Homer-Dixon describes as 'relative deprivation' revolving around perceived growing gaps in mostly economic satisfaction versus the level of satisfaction people actually desire (1999, p. 16). Therefore, when activists in Cairo on January 25, 2011, railed to gather support from people in the city's slums:

> We chanted about economics, not politics. If you are shouting 'Down with Mubarak!' in the slums, nobody cares. They care about food and shelter. So we chanted: 'How expensive is bread; how expensive is sugar; why do we have to sell our furniture?' And the people joined in (Mason, 2013, p. 13).

Further buttressing structural and environmental scarcity during the Arab Spring was also a growing young population. Writing in 2002 on population and security, Goldstone described that on the whole many nations' population numbers were on a decline, but pointed out that countries in North Africa and the Middle East were experiencing an opposite population surge (2002, pp. 3–4). Writing 9 years later in response to the Arab Spring, Goldstone underscored that since 1990, the youth populations in Tunisia and Libya had grown by 50%, Egypt by 65%, and Yemen at a staggering 125% (2011, p. 12). Youth bulges in general, as mentioned above in the previous section, do not generate risk unless joined with other factors such as high levels of education, slow growing economies, and small labor markets (Goldstone, 2002, pp. 3–4). In their efforts to restructure and liberalize their countries, places such as Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt had put greater emphasis increasing general education but this

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was not followed by the creation of new job markets (Heydarian, 2021, pp. 74–75; also see Turchin, 2023 on elite over production). The establishment of new employment sectors for this growing unemployed youth was further stymied by flagging economic growth after the financial crisis and the corruption from autocratic leaders who gave elite positions to relatively few who were loyal supporters. Bringing all these factors together from the financial crisis, decades of social inequality, environmental scarcity, and a large, dissatisfied youth all culminated together igniting a revolutionary moment that spread from North Africa through the Middle East.

3.3 Impact of the Arab Spring movements: manifestation of and contributor to deepening polycrisis

Although the Arab Spring was conceived in a global polycrisis, we argue that the revolutions also worked to further deepen that polycrisis environment – which is still ongoing – and triggered crises and further conflicts in several other areas. For many people around the world, the Arab Spring offered a glimmer of hope and became a rallying call for social justice for those who lived under corrupt and repressive regimes. For others, though, the Arab Spring represented a threat to regional leaders and their allies who desperately sought to maintain the status quo. Saudi Arabia and UAE sent their militaries to Bahrain to suppress its Arab Spring protests. Similarly, Iran has been eager to prevent the collapse of the Assad government as Syria provides a counterweight to Saudi dominance in the region. Fawaz Gerges comments,

> This new cold war between the leader of Arabian Sunni Islam, Saudi Arabia, and the leader of Shia Islam, (Persian) Iran, has played out on the streets of weaker and more tumultuous countries, particularly Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. It diverted the struggle from social and political emancipation in Arab countries and towards geostrategic and sectarian rivalry (2017, p. 20).

This effort to sustain regional dominance which also plays on religious identity, Sunni versus Shia Islam, has thus paved the way for proxy-wars between Saudi Arabia and Iran and their allies.

The Arab Spring in Yemen led to the end of the 33-year reign of President Ali Abdullah Saleh. After ousting Saleh from power, Yemen then became under the control of a care-taker government by the Vice-President, Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi, who was backed by Saudi Arabia. When Hadi considered making reforms to the constitution and other parts of the government, Houthi rebels (an Iranian-backed Shia group) opposing Hadi's rule obtained large parts of Yemeni territory in the north and eventually captured the capital, Sana'a, forcing Hadi to flee to Riyadh. Drone and missile strikes by Houthi rebels against Saudi Arabia led to Saudi Arabia's official 2015 military involvement in the country with the aim of restoring Hadi to power (Al Jazeera, 2023; Wintour, 2019).

Syria's Arab Spring emerged initially as a protest against rising food prices, unemployment, and corruption but quickly turned into sectarian conflict. As noted by Gerges, Islamist factions in Syria who were fighting against Assad's military clampdown, portrayed themselves as protectors of Sunni Islam who had been persecuted by Assad's Alawite government. As the Syrian Arab Spring morphed into the Syrian Civil War, Iran poured money in propping up Assad whereas Saudi Arabia financially backed rebel groups trying to overthrow the Assad regime (Al Jazeera, 2023). This power vacuum equally gave rise to Islamic extremism and the expansion of ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria). By 2014, ISIS had captured a third of Syrian and Iraqi territory and has spread to other regions such as Libya, Egypt, and has affiliates in Afghanistan (Islamic State Khorasan Province), the Sahel (Islamic State in Greater Sahara), and the Lake Chad Basin (Islamic State West Africa Province) (Gerges, 2017, pp. 2–3).

The presence of ISIS in both Iraq and Syria have also led the United States, and Russia's involvement into this geopolitical proxy war, with each vying to maintain strategic interests in the Middle East. For Russia, involvement in Syria has increased its security risks as ISIS and IS-affiliated terrorist groups have targeted Russian civilians in the 2015 Egyptian airplane crash, the 2017 St. Petersburg metro attack, and the most recent March 2024 shooting at the Crocus City Hall venue in Moscow (Topham et al., 2015). Similarly, the Syrian Civil War has pressed both Lebanon's Hezbollah (under the influence of Iran) and Israel to be involved in these proxy wars. Israel's and Iran's involvement in Syria has become increasingly fraught after the October 7th, 2023, attacks in which Iran supplied weapons to Hezbollah in its ongoing operations against Northern Israel in support of Hamas in Gaza; a strategy that is a part of Iran's 'Axis of Resistance' program to thwart Israeli political aims in the region (Assi, 2023). This has led to a series of Israeli strikes and assassinations, killing the Revolutionary Guard Corps commander Mohammad Reza Zahedi in Damascus who controlled Iranian operations in Syria and Lebanon, and the Hamas political leader, Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, to name only a few examples. Followed by tit for tat drone and missile attacks between Israel and Iran, the theater of war spread into Lebanon targeting Hezbollah, thus creating a broader military conflict and humanitarian crisis until a ceasefire deal was reached in late November 2024 (Al Jazeera, 2024; Lebanon-Ceasefire Agreement, 2024; Sabbagh, 2024; Wintour, 2024). Just a few weeks later in December, the Syrian rebel group, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, with backing from Turkey, launched an offensive taking the cities of Aleppo, Hama, Homs, and eventually Damascus causing Bashar al-Assad to flee to Russia, ending the al-Assad family's 53-year rule over the country. In the aftermath, both Russia (which has been preoccupied with its war with Ukraine) and Iran have lost its stronghold over the region, whereas Turkey has benefited immensely, and will likely influence the policies of the new Syrian government (Ainsworth & Hoyer, 2025).

Tragically caught up in these geopolitical games, Syria's civil war has had a devastating effect on the Syrian population. In total, 14 million Syrian's have been forcibly displaced since the start of 2011. A total of 7.2 million Syrians are internally displaced within the country (UNHCR, 2024). Syrian refugees have also claimed asylum in Europe with Germany hosting over a million and Sweden hosting around 11% of internationally displaced Syrians (UNHCR, 2021). In Germany, the influx of asylum seekers has put strains on local municipalities who are struggling to provide people with housing. With the rise of migration from war-torn countries, xenophobic nationalist and far-right parties in Europe have been dangerously exploiting this situation calling for harsher policies to limit migration numbers, such as Germany's Alternative for Democracy Party (Karnitschnig, 2023). With gains made by the right and far-right in the 2024 European Union (EU) parliamentary elections, asylum policies and the so-called 'European migration crisis' (as it is labeled by conservative politicians) have become hot-topic issues with major implications for Europe's democracy.

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4. Discussion: viewing revolution within a polycrisis lens

As the two case studies detailed above make clear, using the polycrisis concept as a lens to view the lead up to, trajectories of, and wider impacts from revolution can reveal important features of revolutionary dynamics missed by traditional approaches. Polycrisis as envisioned by most scholars points out that 'What may appear to be separate crises in different systems in fact exacerbate and reshape one another to form a conjoined polycrisis that must be understood and addressed as a whole' (Lawrence et al., 2024, p. 6). This conceptualization, we argue, fulfills the critical, and previously unmet, task that Lawson laid out for scholars on revolution. The focus on complex interactions across entangled social, economic, political, and cultural systems that operate both within and between national boundaries represents Lawson's inter-social approach and helps to expose the pressures that build overtime and the triggering events which can move a society out of equilibrium and generate momentum for major, systemic transformation; namely, creating a revolutionary situation.

Lawrence et al. argued that there are five critical, interrelated properties that characterize and enable polycrises to emerge: *multiple causes*, *non-linearity*, *hysteresis*, *boundary permeability*, and *black swan events*. Identifying these properties within interconnected sets of systems can help reveal the onset of a polycrisis situation, and in so doing perhaps offer insight into how such complex, interrelated stresses can be mitigated or managed (see Albert, 2024; Lawrence et al., 2024; Mark et al., forthcoming). As revolution can be one rather significant outcome or manifestation of polycrisis and, as we show above, its impacts can reverberate throughout global systems and further deepen existing polycrises, we argue that these same five properties are fruitfully applied to identifying and explaining the dynamics of revolutions. The cases documented above detailing the pressures that gave rise to the Young Turk and Arab Spring revolutions highlight such application as well as their striking similarities.

First, both the Young Turk Revolution and the Arab Spring were never linked to one single crisis or primary cause, but in fact were driven by *multiple causes* shifting between temporal and spatial bounds. In the Ottoman case, European wars, expansionism and interference in Ottoman internal affairs, the rise of nationalism, Ottoman economic crises exacerbated by free market trade, ecological strain, disaffected young educated military officers who were unable to advance, and the suppression and corruption by Sultan Abdülhamid all contributed to the outbreak of the 1908 revolution. Similarly, for the Arab Spring, stressors from the 2008 financial crisis, a move by Arab countries to integrate into neoliberal markets at the expense of social welfare systems, crony capitalism, food shortages, and mass migration driven by anthropogenic climate change, high unemployment rates of educated youth all contributed to the wave of revolutionary protests throughout North Africa and the Middle East. Therefore, there was no one 'straw' that broke the camel's back, but instead a long-term build-up of situational imbalances, inequalities, environmental factors, and poor policy making.

Second, there is *non-linearity* displayed in both cases particularly in the feedback loops between the different crises and triggers that arose. This is seen clearly in the stressors leading to the Young Turk Revolution where, to keep up with Westernized standards, not only did the Ottoman Empire take out loans at high rates, but they also eventually became bankrupt and controlled by the European-led PDA which strictly managed Ottoman revenues. Intensifying and feeding into this economic issue was resentment by young educated military students who benefited from Ottoman educational reforms, but were irregularly paid and often held low paid ranked positions while their superiors who were less educated advanced through patrimonialist systems and were paid higher salaries. Similarly, stresses in one system loop back to amplify stresses in other systems, notably witnessed in the rise in food prices due to speculation in food and energy sectors in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. For countries such as Egypt, which privatized industries and depended on food imports, this created higher prices for consumers. Making matters worse, drought in wheat exporting countries further added to food costs causing widespread anger among the working classes as food was becoming unaffordable. As each force grew and spurred dysfunction in other areas, the result was a greater level of overall stress across societies than would be likely from any one crisis acting on its own.

Hysteresis in which systems move out of equilibrium in sometimes non-reversible ways is also witnessed. In the case of Syria, decades of poor water management in which ground water supplies were drastically diminished exacerbated the impact of the 2006–2009 drought resulting in the failed harvests and the death of livestock and further causing internal displacement of massive numbers of farmers to cities in search of work. The vulnerabilities that had built up in Syria's water supply systems simply could not be managed when the shock of severe drought hit. Moreover, the dismantling of social welfare programs over decades added further stress, as many faced unemployment, corruption, and lack of basic needs in the lead-up to the revolution. Trigger events such as the brutal arrest and torture of teenagers graffitiing slogans against Bashar al-Assad acted as tipping points in these systems with long-developing dysfunction, causing fast-moving actions through protests pushing the state out of equilibrium into 'a landscape without settling […] thus remaining in a highly unstable and potentially harmful state' (Lawrence et al., 2023).

The complex entanglements that revolutionary situations emerge from further exhibit *boundary permeability*. In this context, these revolutionary moments did not arise out of a straightforward temporal sequence of cause-and-effect, rather they emerged in non-linear trajectories, with specters from earlier actions reappearing, feeding back, and mingling with the present and the future. Elaborating on philosopher Jacques Derrida's hauntology where events from the past lurk in the shadows of contemporary time, Mark Tamm remarks '[t]he present is never synchronous or contemporaneous to himself; it always contains elements coming from the past (and the future); it is always haunted by the ghosts of previous periods' (2015, p. 4). The Latin for *revolution* – *revolutio* meaning the action of rolling back, return or recurrence of a point or period indeed highlights these hauntings. In the case of the Young Turk Revolution, the question over Ottoman Macedonia which had been disputed by the European Powers, nationalist groups, and the Ottoman government since the second half of the nineteenth century, was persistent and continued to be volatile up to the Second Balkan War of 1913. Similarly, earlier events can come back to haunt or come full circle, when European actors from the Congress of Berlin in 1878 allowed for Austria-Hungary to occupy Ottoman Bosnia-Herzegovina creating long-standing resentment by nationalist groups such as Young Bosnia which ultimately led to the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Not only does the boundary permeability 'operate on multiple timescales', but it

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also 'cross boundaries of political and administrative units' (Lawrence et al., 2024, p. 8). As witnessed in both case studies, there was a push and pull between spatial as well as temporal contexts. Stressors in one area weakened resilience in other systems. Domino effects similarly occurred where crises in one area triggered events and crises others, exemplified in the rapid spread of the Arab Spring protests from Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain.

Lastly, as we have maintained throughout this article, revolutions can be manifestations of multiple crises and/or polycrisis but can similarly be generators of the stressors that create and sustain polycrisis. As *Black Swan* events, revolutions have historically been rare and have proven hard to predict. However, the extreme outcomes that result from revolutions can spur further dysfunctions, meaning that revolutions can cascade into other significant crises causing deep uncertainty. The Young Turk Revolution and the counterrevolution of 1909, notably, heavily contributed to stressors that led to the Balkan wars and, in turn, World War I, particularly through the insurgence of nationalism. The CUP's repression and Turkification program increased exclusionary practices that fueled the grievances of non-Turkish and/or Muslim Ottomans. The failings of the CUP to provide equal rights to all the empire's citizens ignited and exacerbated nationalist rivalries in Ottoman Macedonia and the Balkans at large. Greeks, Serbs, Bulgarians, and Ottoman Albanians each sought territorial claims and independence which led to the violence of the Balkan wars. Equally, these nationalist tensions affected the rivalry between Russia and Austria-Hungary who competed for influence in the region ultimately drawing their tenuous alliance systems into the conflict that would be World War I, which we consider a historical polycrisis. Similarly, the Arab Spring has unwittingly facilitated extreme crises through proxy wars in Yemen and Syria. Power vacuums that resulted in Syria and Libya have allowed for extremist groups such as ISIS and its affiliates to thrive. Furthermore, these conflicts have also contributed to the mass migration of people not only throughout the Middle East, but to Europe where far-right and populist xenophobic rhetoric and anti-migration narratives have real consequences on European elections and democracy. Therefore, we see revolutions and the stressors they produce as 'entities-in-motion', borrowing from Lawson's terminology, deepening stress and dysfunction, and generating further risks (2019, p. 62).

4.1 The future of radical and/or revolutionary movements in an age of polycrisis

Although the lens of polycrisis has been extremely useful in the analysis of revolutionary situations, trajectories, and outcomes, understanding revolution is equally beneficial for the study of polycrisis. In regard to the Arab Spring, the inequalities that generated those revolutions not only affected a specifically North African or Middle East context but also had consequences for a global wave of socio-political demonstrations, riots, and strikes from 2011 to 2015 (see Korotayev et al., 2022a, pp. 830–839, 2022b). The revolutionary spirit and knowledge gained from the Arab Spring also inspired occupations and protests against the fallout from the financial crisis and austerity measures throughout the Eurozone and the United States. In Greece, activists inspired by the protests and occupation of Tahrir Square in Cairo and Madrid's occupation of Puerta del Sol gave rise to the occupation of Athens' Syntagma Square in the spring and summer of 2011 (Chakrabortty, 2011). Activist networks in the United States, specifically in New York City inspired by occupations elsewhere established their own occupy movement with Occupy Wall Street and their encampment at Zuccotti Park during September 2011 eventually spreading to other parts of the United States. As anthropologist and early founding member of Occupy Wall Street, David Graeber argued 'Occupy is […] simply the North American manifestation of a democratic rebellion that began in Tunisia in January 2011, and by the end of that year was threatening to call into question existing structures of power everywhere' (2013, p. 130). The transboundary revolutionary networks and frameworks were able to call to question the financialization of the global economy that had brought a global recession, mass debt, stagflation, and wealth inequality.

Unfortunately, the situation has not much improved in the decade or so since the Arab Spring and Occupy movements. We still live in an era of increasing disparity both between and within societies. According to the World Inequality Report, in terms of global wealth inequality 'The poorest half of the global population barely owns any wealth at all possessing just 2% of the total. In contrast, the richest 10% of the global population own 76% of all wealth' (Chancel et al., 2022). The Brookings Institute has also underscored that our contemporary levels of income and wealth inequality are comparable to the levels observed during the Belle Époque right before World War I, a frightening statistic if we think about the early history of the twentieth century (Qureshi, 2023). These economic imbalances do not just affect wages but are deep drivers of weakening trust in government institutions, creating polarization (through the hardening of political party lines, racist/xenophobic rhetoric, and nationalism), and having real impacts on tackling climate change. We are undoubtedly in an Age of Polycrisis.

As we move forward in the twenty-first century, it will be these structural inequities that spur on radical change and movements both good and bad. As our modern polycrisis continues unabated and further deepens, the chances of revolutionary or radical movements arising in the ways we have illustrated here grow as well. But what do these future radical and revolutionary movements look like?

Cross-sectional movements such as Occupy Wall Street, mentioned above, which have risen out of current woes are horizontal in their mobilization (meaning they lack a hierarchical structure), do not seek to become political parties, and incorporate an inclusive and diverse group of individuals (see Graeber, 2013; Lawson, 2019, pp. 230–234). One of the radical components of the Occupy Wall Street and similar movements is their move away from traditional revolutionary ideologies or 'revolutionary utopias' which can use violence as a means of action or in turn become authoritarian (Lawson, 2019, p. 232). In fact, Occupy Wall Street was compelling as a movement through its creativity of refusing to engage in the existing political system which it viewed as corrupt and instead engaging in new forms of direct democracy without a leadership structure (see Graeber, 2013, p. 89). Moreover, it was the idea that radical action could allow for the imagination and possibilities of new capitalist systems that were workable instead of believing the system we exist in is the only viable option. For Lawson, this is one example of revolutionary futures, in which we see 'r' revolutions versus big 'R' Revolutions. Lawson notes 'If big "R" Revolution presents itself as a Messiah bringing redemption to history's injustices, small "r" revolutions are humbler. Their promise is not earthly salvation, but the striving for the *possibility* of radical transformation, of something better, even if that something better will never be realized' (2019, p. 247). This

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notion of small 'r' revolution echoes the Gramscian concept of hegemony with its emphasis on 'experimental risk' to mobilize the involvement of subaltern groups to engage in emancipatory politics even if there are no guarantees of its effectiveness (Thomas, 2023, p. 233). Thus, perhaps, it's the small and creative radical acts that push for alternatives even if they fail which can offer truly revolutionary glimpses.

Also emerging from large inequalities comes populism and anti-establishment views rearing up in global politics. Similar to social movements such as Occupy, populism equally rails against the ills of neoliberalism, particularly giving voice to those who feel forgotten in an age of global connectivity. In contrast however, populism often creates exclusionary rhetoric scapegoating immigrants, wokeness, and others for people's feelings of downtroddenness (Lawson, pp. 240–244). For the leaders of populism, they are *vox populi*, they are the ones who can 'drain the swamp' as Donald Trump famously remarked when commenting on removing the long-standing political elites from office who have failed to provide for the people. Populism therefore is a movement of extreme perceived feelings of fear and anxiety and it's not surprising that so many are turning to these dangerous viewpoints in moments of upheaval, one only needs to think back to the interwar years in Europe. But as EU and US elections have produced right and far-right victories, values are being questioned, and politics hangs in the balance. The direction of the EU and the United States is unclear on many issues such as migration, climate change, economics, health, and social realms.

Crucially, when navigating the systemic risks and the entanglements of complex systems that can lead to revolutionary situations or radical movements, it is important to similarly remember that the word for crisis derives from the ancient Greek verb *κρίνω* (krino) meaning to decide ('Crisis', 2023). We can decide our future and we can also turn crises around. To do this, we must make bold and equitable policy decisions that create resilience for our societies and environments. To generate insightful policy and to combat systemic risks we need to have cross-disciplinary dialogues learning from environmental sciences, history, anthropology, politics, economics, and health practitioners. Breaking down the silos that have created short sightedness in the past must give way to interdisciplinary methodologies where each discipline can fill in the blanks of the other. It will be these integrative and multi-faceted approaches that will create important risks insights and naturally stimulate progressive policies for our societies.

5. Conclusions

To actualize Lawson's theorization of the inter-social approach, revolutions must be examined through the lens of polycrisis. Although revolutions are intrinsically unique, their regularities fit within a polycrisis framework where global systems intertwine and merge creating complex stressors and triggers that cause revolutionary moments, trajectories, and outcomes. As witnessed from the case studies of the Young Turk Revolution and the Arab Spring, both exhibit the five interrelated properties that characterize polycrisis: *multiple causes*, *non-linearity*, *hysteresis*, *boundary permeability*, and *black swan events*. Thus, we have argued that revolutions and polycrisis are inextricably linked: revolutions are therefore manifestations of multiple crises and/or polycrisis as well as contributors to the stresses and outcomes that comprise polycrisis. Lastly, this paper has offered insights into the deep drivers of social unrest, mainly structural inequality, and the positive crisis decision-making needed to make lasting and resilient adaptations.

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