

## Global Revolution

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In his lectures on the philosophy of history, given at the University of Berlin between 1822 and 1831, only a few decades after the storming of the Bastille, G. W. F. Hegel noted that the significance of the French Revolution, with its “external expansion,” had been “world historical,” changing the history of not only one country, but the globe.<sup>1</sup> His view reflected the vision many French and other revolutionaries of the time had had themselves. Some years later, in 1848, as revolutions spread across Europe and beyond, Marx and Engels considered the prospect of world revolution, calling for the “workers of the world” to “unite.”<sup>2</sup> Similarly, after the Russian Revolution of 1917, Lenin claimed that the time had come for the revolutionaries across “all countries and nations throughout the world” to rise in “alliance and unity.”<sup>3</sup> And amidst the global upheaval of 1989, Francis Fukuyama pondered whether the fundamental transformations that engulfed “many regions in the world” would affect “world history.”<sup>4</sup>

Strikingly, contemporaries of all major revolutions of the modern age considered them to be of global significance – the beginning of a new era for humanity. This was the result of the universalist ideas these revolts represented, fought in the name of all humankind. Yet it also reflected

<sup>1</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, ed. by D. Eduard Gans (Berlin, 1837), 444, originally given between 1822 and 1831; for the English translation, Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York, 1956), 285. Joachim Ritter, *Hegel und die Französische Revolution* (Cologne, 1957), provides the context.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, “The Manifesto of the Communist Party,” in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols. (London, 1975–2004), vol. 6 (*Marx and Engels: 1845–48*) (London, 1976), 477–519, 519, which was first published as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei* (London, 1848), 23. The sentence of the manifesto (“Proletarier aller Länder, vereinigt euch!”) was translated as “Working Men of All Countries, Unite!”

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, “Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and the Colonial Questions,” in *V. I. Lenin: Collected Works*, 45 vols. (London, 1960–1980), vol. 31 (*April–December 1920*) (London, 1966), 144–51, 151, originally published on June 5, 1920.

<sup>4</sup> Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?,” *The National Interest* 16 (1989), 3–18, 3, and, more detailed, Idem, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York, 1992).

their actual geographical reach. Contemporary observers witnessed that revolutions were rarely confined within one country. Most revolutions of the modern era spread across state borders, engulfing entire regions, continents, and, at times, the globe.

The earliest revolutionary wave in modern history was that of the Atlantic Revolutions, which began with the American Revolution of 1776 and, in 1789, swept over to France. Inspired by the idea of liberty, revolutionaries fought against the old aristocratic elites and colonial rulers. They sparked the Haitian Revolution of 1791, the Irish Rebellion of 1798, and the revolutionary wars in Latin America. Around the same time, similar revolutions broke out in the Netherlands, Belgium, Poland, and the Ottoman Empire. Even more closely linked were the upheavals of 1848. Across Europe, revolutionaries radicalized by ideas of liberalism and nationalism went to the barricades to confront absolutist regimes. Revolts began in January in the streets of Palermo, soon sparking unrest on the Italian peninsula. The February Revolution in France toppled King Louis Philippe and led to an escalation of events. Civil war spread across the German states, the Habsburg Empire, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Ireland. In many places, martial law was declared and most of the protests were put down, with thousands killed. In the end, revolutionary turmoil even reached Europe's overseas empires. In Asia, the events of 1848 were echoed in the constitutional revolutions of the early twentieth century. Japan's defeat of Russia and the ensuing Russian Revolution of 1905 sparked the Persian Constitutional Revolution in the same year, the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 in the Ottoman Empire, and, finally, the Chinese Revolution of 1911. In the Russo-Japanese War, a non-European country with a constitution had prevailed over a European country without one. Meiji Japan thus became a shining model of modernization in the eyes of many activists and reformers in Asia, eager to confront traditional society and the autocratic political order. Soon, the constitutional revolutionary wave spread beyond the Middle East and East Asia, reaching Europe – with the Greek Revolution of 1909, the Portuguese Revolution of 1910, and the 1910 Constitutional Revolution of Monaco – and even America.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 had similarly profound global repercussions. Inspired by the events in St. Petersburg, revolutionaries across the world rose to overthrow the existing order, leading to the proclamation of the Munich Soviet Republic, the Hungarian Revolution and the foundation of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, the Limerick Soviet, and the Galician Soviet Socialist Republic. The Bolsheviks also inspired countless movements beyond Europe, perhaps most notably the Iranian insurgents under the charismatic guerrilla leader Mirza Kuchik Khan,

who, in 1920, declared the short-lived Persian Socialist Soviet Republic in Gilan. Almost equally intense was the wave of anticolonial upheavals after the First World War. Fuelled by President Wilson's (and European statesmen's) promises of national self-determination, in 1919 anti-colonial demonstrations broke out in Egypt, Tunisia, India, Korea, China, French Indochina, and beyond. In Cairo, Egyptian women, for the first time in history, took to the streets to join in public protest. In the end, this wave of upheaval receded. Hopes for independence remained unfulfilled. Yet, soon however, anticolonial revolutionaries would rise again. During the Cold War, several chains of "Third World" revolutions shook Africa, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America. Marxist slogans of world revolution fired American paranoia about the spread of communism through a domino effect. Ironically, the Cold War ended in a wave of demonstrations that overthrew most of the world's communist regimes. In Europe, protests began in Poland, spread to Hungary, East Germany, Bulgaria, and Czechoslovakia, and finally, in late 1989, reached Ceaușescu's Romania. Earlier that year, in China, the Tiananmen Square protests were crushed in a bloodbath, while communist rule was abandoned across most of Asia and Africa. Since then, new waves of revolution, most importantly the Color Revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, and the upheavals of the "Arab Spring," have followed. This book traces and examines the nature of these revolutionary waves. It shows that the major nineteenth- and twentieth-century revolutions and revolutionary movements, which have mainly been studied as isolated national or imperial events, were in fact all remarkably international.

The following chapters examine similarities and differences, through comparison, between revolutions that broke out at around the same time in different countries (and the volume as a whole compares the revolutionary waves to each other).<sup>5</sup> They show that these revolutions were often defined as much by their differences as they were by their similarities. Comparison is of course not without epistemological problems: We

<sup>5</sup> Patrick O'Brien, "Historiographical Traditions and Modern Imperatives for the Restoration of Global History," *Journal of Global History* 1, 1 (2006), 3–39; and the contributions to Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka (eds.), *Geschichte und Vergleich: Ansätze und Ergebnisse international vergleichender Geschichtsschreibung* (Frankfurt, 1996); Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka (eds.), *Comparative and Transnational History: Central European Approaches and New Perspectives* (New York, 2009); and, more generally, the contributions to Anil Bhatti and Dorothee Kimmich (eds.), *Ähnlichkeit: Ein kulturtheoretisches Paradigma* (Konstanz, 2015), on comparative history. Michel Espagne, "Sur les limites du comparatisme en histoire culturelle," *Genèses: Sciences Sociales et Histoire* 17 (1994), 112–21; and, more generally, R. Radhakrishnan, "Why Compare?," *New Literary History* 40, 3 (2009), 453–71, provide critical reflections.

always need to keep in mind that in any comparison, the cases being compared and the criteria used to compare them have been consciously chosen. Also, our units of comparison are not necessarily independent from one another – in some cases they are connected and in other cases not.

The book also, and perhaps more importantly, traces the links, both indirect and direct, between simultaneous revolutions.<sup>6</sup> Some of these connections were seen by contemporaries. Others can be reconstructed by historians, but were not visible to those living through the events at the time. First, there could be indirect connections between simultaneous revolutions through similar external (structural) transformations – such as major wars, global economic crises, or the collapse of empires – that led to conjunctural revolutionary power struggles in different countries. A prominent example is the First World War, causing political instability across continents, which led to the global revolutionary moments of 1917 and 1919.

Second, there could be direct links between revolutionary movements across state borders. After all, modern revolutions took place in a world of thickening global connections that resulted from imperialism, trade and commerce, and modern means of communication and transport. As the world became more integrated, the spread of revolutions across towns and provinces, nations and empires, regions and continents, and indeed the globe, accelerated.

Important hereby was often the movement of rebels. Major revolutionary figures, from Thomas Paine to M. N. Roy, as well as lesser-known itinerant rebels, roamed the globe. They often created new transimperial and transnational spaces of cooperation and global revolutionary sociability. At times, they were connected to revolutionary regimes attempting to export their revolutions to other countries. Throughout the modern era, such states provided military and non-military assistance to revolutionary movements abroad; examples range from the aid the Bolsheviks

<sup>6</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia,” *Modern Asian Studies* 31, 3 (1997), 735–62; and, identically, Idem, “Connected Histories: Toward a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia,” in Victor B. Lieberman (ed.), *Beyond Binary Histories: Reimagining Eurasia to c. 1830* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1997), 289–316; Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, “Vergleich, Transfer, Verflechtung: der Ansatz der Histoire croisée und die Herausforderung des Transnationalen,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 28, 4 (2002), 607–36; Idem, “Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity,” *History and Theory* 45, 1 (2006), 30–50; and Caroline Douki and Philippe Minard, “Histoire globale, histoires connectées: un changement d’échelle historiographique?,” *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine* 54-4bis, 5 (2007), 7–21, on connective history.

sent across the Caspian Sea to northern Persia in 1920–21 to the Cuban mission to Congo in 1965.

More importantly, revolutionary ideas (and the language in which they were conveyed) frequently resonated beyond state borders. Most of the revolutionaries of the modern age made universal claims, promoting ideas such as republicanism, constitutionalism, communism, or liberalism, and sought to replace the old rulers with popular forms of government, which all had a genuine attraction to revolutionary movements across the world. Also, the adoption of revolutionary ideas from abroad had a pragmatic appeal, since they had proven to be successful elsewhere and since they could help a revolutionary group appear to be part of a powerful global movement. The following chapters examine the ways in which revolutionary ideas and slogans spread and changed their meanings in different local contexts, taking into account differences in political and social conditions. The media used to circulate revolutionary messages were diverse, ranging from letters, pamphlets, newspapers, and books to radio, television, computers, and mobile phones. Ideas could be conveyed in scholarly texts, photographs, songs, poems, artworks, and many other forms. The transmission of ideas changed dramatically over the centuries. In the Atlantic Revolutions, which stretched over nearly five decades, revolutionary thoughts could only cross the oceans on sailing vessels. As modern communication became more advanced, the pace of revolutionary waves increased. In 1905, when the Constitutional Revolutions shook Asia, revolutionary slogans were circulated by telegraph and modern means of transport – railways and steamers – within hours. Over the course of the twentieth century, technological innovations became ever more important for the global expansion of political mass mobilization.

To be sure, when examining the spread of revolts we need to avoid the assumption of a simple diffusion from center to periphery.<sup>7</sup> This also means that in various cases, Europe was not the epicenter of global revolutionary moments. Although several of the global revolutionary waves of the modern age originated in Europe, most European revolutions were themselves influenced by global transformations. Movements in the colonial world, such as the American Revolution, could have a remarkable impact on the imperial centers of Europe and on Europe's global imperial webs. In fact, as this volume shows, there was often more than one center, and that transfers could go in more than one direction, as

<sup>7</sup> James M. Blaut, *The Colonizer's Model of the World: Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric History* (New York, 1993), 1–49, offers a more general critique of Eurocentric diffusionism.

revolutionary movements influenced each other. Moreover, the authors point to the limits of the spread of revolutions, examining the peaking, breaking, and ebbing of revolutionary waves.

Finally, there could be another form of direct connection between simultaneous revolutions, which did not necessarily involve the movement of revolutionaries or the transfer of ideas. A revolution in one state could cause major political, economic, and social instability in another, leading to a revolutionary situation there. The most prominent example of such a shock is the Atlantic upheaval, when the American Revolution, which was supported by substantial French funds, led to the French economic crisis, one of the causes of the French Revolution.<sup>8</sup>

The concept of “revolution,” although central to our political vocabulary, lacks semantic clarity. Its definition has differed dramatically across time and space. “Revolution,” as a historical concept, could mean very different things in different settings, from the *thawra* of the Arab world to China’s *gemin*.<sup>9</sup> Using the Western (European and American) concept of “revolution” to study upheavals across the world may obscure as much as it allows us to see.<sup>10</sup> Also, its use may implicitly impose standards that make non-Western upheavals look deficient. And yet, compared to most other political concepts, the meaning of “revolution” has often been surprisingly similar in different parts of the world.

Moreover, the idea of “revolution” has evolved over time. The English word “revolution,” for example – a term used with only

<sup>8</sup> Lynn Hunt, “The Global Financial Origins of 1789,” in Suzanne Desan, Lynn Hunt, and William Max Nelson (eds.), *The French Revolution in Global Perspective* (Ithaca, NY, 2013), 32–43, provides an excellent discussion of these connections.

<sup>9</sup> Reinhard Koselleck, “Der neuzeitliche Revolutionsbegriff als geschichtliche Kategorie,” *Studium Generale* 22 (1969), 825–38, reprinted as “Historische Kriterien des neuzeitlichen Revolutionsbegriff,” in Idem, *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeitung* (Frankfurt, 1979), 68–9, translated as “Historical Criteria of the Modern Concept of Revolution,” in Idem, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York, 2004), 43–57, as well as Reinhard Koselleck, Neithard Bulst, Jörg Fisch, and Christian Meier, “Revolution, Rebellion, Aufruhr, Bürgerkrieg” in Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck (eds.), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, 8 vols. (Stuttgart, 1972–1997), vol. 5 (Stuttgart, 1984), 653–788, provide good overviews of the history of the concept of “revolution.” A classic is Eugen Rosenstock, “Revolution als politischer Begriff,” in *Festgabe der rechts- und staatswissenschaftlichen Fakultät in Breslau für Paul Heiborn zum 70. Geburtstag, 6. Februar 1931* (Breslau, 1931), 83–124. More detailed discussions provide Karl Griewank, *Der neuzeitliche Revolutionsbegriff: Entstehung und Entwicklung* (Weimar, 1955); and Karl-Heinz Bender, *Revolutionen: Die Entstehung des politischen Revolutionsbegriffes in Frankreich zwischen Mittelalter und Aufklärung* (Munich, 1977).

<sup>10</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NY, 2000), problematizes the universal use of European concepts to study societies around the world. Hajimr Nakamura, *Parallel Developments: A Comparative History of Ideas* (New York, 1975), argues that some concepts are (and become) similar across the globe.

small spelling variations (“révolution,” “revolución,” “revolyutsiya,” and so on) from Eastern Europe to Latin America – has significantly changed its meaning over the centuries. Indeed, it is worth reminding ourselves that its pre-modern and modern meanings were quite different. Prior to the French Revolution, the term signified the cyclical return to a previous political order in the course of history, a natural rotation back to a starting point. Originally an astronomical concept, popularized through Copernicus’s *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* (1543), describing the revolving motion of the planets, it entered political language in the seventeenth century. This pre-modern political conception of “revolution” was in fact similar to the classical political theories of Plato’s change of states, *metavoli politeion*, or Polybius’s cycle of states, *politeion anakyklosis*, the natural motion of different forms of political order returning to a point of departure – for example, monarchy, to aristocracy, to oligarchy, to democracy, to ochlocracy, to monarchy.<sup>11</sup> It was based on the assumption that the creation of an entirely new political and social order was impossible, and that every major political change was a preordained stage in the cycle of political orders. Moreover, it assumed that the entire historical process was beyond human control, a natural event leaving no agency to mortals. It was a “metahistorical” or “transhistorical concept of revolution,” as Reinhart Koselleck once put it.<sup>12</sup> Thus, Hobbes, for example, used the word “revolution” to characterize the upheavals in England from the 1640s to the 1660s, which may be seen as a full cycle of political orders (monarchy, parliaments, Cromwell’s dictatorship, oligarchies, monarchy): “I have seen in this revolution a circular motion of the sovereign power.”<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the “Glorious Revolution” of 1688 was termed a “revolution” by contemporaries in the sense that it constituted a cycle that started with the overthrow of the monarchy of James II and ended with the establishment of the monarchy of William and Mary. To be sure, the meaning of the early modern concept of revolution, as Keith Baker pointed out, could have nuances, at times simply implying sudden change, rupture, and

<sup>11</sup> Peter Derow, “Historical Explanation: Polybius and his Predecessors,” in Simon Hornblower (ed.) *Greek Historiography* (Oxford, 1994), 73–90, provides a good overview. On *politeion anakyklosis*, see *Polybius: The Histories*, ed. by W. R. Paton, 6 vols. (London 1922–1927), vol. 6 (London, 1927); and on *metavoli politeion*, see book 8 of *Plato: The Republic*, ed. by Paul Shorey, 2 vols. (London, 1930–1935), vol. 2 (London, 1935).

<sup>12</sup> Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 46, 47, and 48, for “transhistorical”; and 50, for “metahistorical.”

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Behemoth or the Long Parliament* (London, 1889), 204, which was first published in 1679. Mark Hartman, “Hobbes’s Concept of Political Revolution,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 47, 3 (1986), 487–95, provides the context.

disorder.<sup>14</sup> In any case, before 1789, the sort of violent political and social upheaval that we would call “revolution” today was commonly termed “rebellion”, “revolt”, “uprising”, “riot”, or “insurrection”. Hannah Arendt once observed that “revolutions, properly speaking, did not exist prior to the modern age,” which is hard to dispute if we compare her modern notion of “revolution” with that of pre-modern thinkers.<sup>15</sup>

Over the course of the eighteenth century, particularly during the Enlightenment, as the term became more widespread, its meaning began to change. A revolution was seen less and less as a natural, irresistible phenomenon and more as an act rooted in human agency. At the same time, the idea of the “people” became important, as revolutions came to be seen as a collective act. Moreover, it was increasingly thought to result in an entirely new political and social order; this was to some extent the result of a new understanding of time, in which older cyclical notions of human history were replaced by new linear conceptions. And finally, the new understanding of revolution had increasingly optimistic connotations of emancipation, liberation, and progress. When Marx, in the mid-nineteenth century, identified revolutions as the “locomotives of history,” it was exactly this idea of progress that he was emphasizing.<sup>16</sup> It is also worth noting that this modern transformation of the meaning of the word “revolution” can also be observed in some other linguistic universes, most notably perhaps in the case of the Arabic word *inqilab*, which is used in Persian (more than in Arabic).

After the Atlantic Revolutions, this new notion of “revolution” became the norm, even globally. Still, as a historical concept it has always had different meanings in different places and at different times; those uprisings termed “revolution” by contemporaries could differ significantly in character. This book will take into account the historical concept of “revolution” as it was used by contemporaries, yet it will employ the term first and foremost as an analytic, not historical, concept.

Scholars have proposed a wide range of definitions of “revolution” as an analytic concept to study past and present societies. Some of them are rather broad, such as Crane Brinton’s (classic) definition of revolution as a violent and successful upheaval that leads to the “drastic, sudden substitution of one group in charge of the running of a territorial political

<sup>14</sup> Keith Michael Baker, “Revolutionizing Revolution,” in Keith Michael Baker and Dan Edelstein (eds.), *Scripting Revolution: A Historical Approach to the Comparative Study of Revolutions* (Stanford, CA, 2015), 71–102.

<sup>15</sup> Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York, 1963), 2.

<sup>16</sup> Karl Marx, “The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850,” in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, vol. 10 (*Marx and Engels: 1849–51*) (London, 1978), 45–145, 122, which was first published as Karl Marx, “Die Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich, 1840–1850,” *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 (1850).



entity by another group hitherto not running that government.”<sup>17</sup> Others are narrower, like Theda Skocpol’s (now equally classic) definition of revolutions – “social revolutions,” as she termed them – as successful (though not necessarily violent) upheavals that lead to a “rapid” and “basic” transformation of not only the political order but also society and class structure.<sup>18</sup> Some scholars have put forward more complex definitions. Charles Tilly conceptualized revolutions as a successful “forcible transfer of power over a state in the course of which at least two distinct blocs of contenders make incompatible claims to control the state, and some significant portion of the population subject to the state’s jurisdiction acquiesces in the claims of each bloc.”<sup>19</sup> He understood a revolution as a combination of a “revolutionary situation,” which is a situation in which two incompatible blocs claim control over a polity, and a “revolutionary outcome,” which is the actual transfer of state power.

The chapters in this book follow a basic definition of revolution as a condition in which a substantial part of the population challenges its rulers’ claim to power over the state – leading to a split in the polity – and which results in abrupt (and often violent) political change. Yet it should be mentioned that major attempted revolutions, which only fulfill parts of this definition, will also be considered. After all, even unsuccessful revolts could have a profound impact on individuals, changing their lives forever, and, in any case, the results of revolutions have not always been unambiguous. Still, there are of course various forms of inner-state conflict that lead to abrupt political change which do not constitute revolutions, such as coup d’états, succession struggles, and civil wars (although they can overlap).<sup>20</sup> Although our definition is strictly political, it should be noted that revolutions have always had a significant cultural dimension, shaping political cultures and social milieus, transforming

<sup>17</sup> Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution* (New York, 1965), 4; a first version of the text was published in 1938.

<sup>18</sup> Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge, 1979), 4–5. Karl Marx had already written: “Every revolution dissolves the *old society* and to that extent it is *social*. Every revolution overthrows the *old power* and to that extent it is *political*”, see Karl Marx, “Critical Marginal Notes on the Article ‘The King of Prussia and Social Reform. By a Prussian,’” in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, vol. 3 (*Marx and Engels: 1843–44*) (London, 1975), 189–206, 205, which was first published as Karl Marx, “Kritische Randglossen zu dem Artikel ‘Der König von Preußen und die Sozialreform: Von einem Preußen,’” *Vorwärts!* 63 (August 7, 1844) and 64 (August 10, 1844).

<sup>19</sup> Charles Tilly, *European Revolutions, 1492–1992* (Oxford, 1993), 1–20.

<sup>20</sup> Koselleck, Bulst, Fisch, and Meier, “Revolution, Rebellion, Aufbruch, Bürgerkrieg,” on the concepts of “revolution” and “civil war.” David Armitage, *Civil Wars: A History in Ideas* (New Haven, CT, 2017), provides an excellent discussion of ideas of “civil war.”

political languages and worldviews, evoking hopes and fears. Considering revolutions to be neither progressive nor regressive per se, the following chapters will, as far as possible, avoid value judgments. Revolutions could be as emancipatory as they could be authoritarian. Finally, the concept of a revolutionary wave will be defined as a series of revolutions with similar aims which break out in different states around the same time and which are connected by common external causes or (and) because they directly impact each other.

Scholars have studied the mechanics of revolutions for decades, examining their reasons (both deeper long-term causes – material and ideological – and short-term triggers), actors, objectives, means, and courses, starting from individual acts of civil disobedience, developing into collective acts of civil disobedience, pivoting with the emergence of a movement with its own internal dynamics, and possibly ending with transfers of control of the state apparatus and the breakdown of the hegemony of the old rulers' world views. Ultimately, however, every revolution is unique, shaped by its specific contexts and contingencies, and any attempt to establish some sort of general theory of revolution is bound to suffer from the reductionism. The diversity in the character of revolutions also makes writing their global history a complicated matter. And yet, a global history may provide general insights into the nature of revolutions while avoiding the temptation to make wild theoretical generalizations.

The major revolutions of the modern age are often considered to have been distinct, isolated national events: The French Revolution is and remains “French” in French popular memory, just like the Egyptian Revolution of 1919 is remembered as an “Egyptian” revolt by Egyptians, and the Iranian Revolution of 1978–79 as “Iranian” in Iran. In Germany, the image prevails that it was the protesters on the streets of Leipzig, Dresden, and Berlin, chanting the nationalist slogan “We are the people” (“Wir sind das Volk”), who brought down the Berlin wall, not events beyond German borders. National exceptionalism remains at the heart of the popular narratives of modern revolutions. In the age of the nation-state, we have come to see (and glorify) revolutions as *national* events. Most of the time, however, they have in fact been strikingly international and part of broader revolutionary waves. No scholar studying revolutions can afford not to take into account their transnational and transimperial environments.

Over the years, social and political scientists have produced a vast body of works on revolutions. It includes more theoretical works, such as the classics of Lyford Edwards, George Pattee, Crane Brinton, Chalmers Johnson, and Jean Baechler, which use historical examples