

## 1 Toward a Psychology of Revolution

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Revolutions in a society resemble earthquakes. Suddenly – often unexpectedly – there emerges a rupture in the texture of the society that leads to turmoil in economics, the social order, and human states of mind. At all levels of a society under revolution, expectations arise that life will never be the same. But how precisely do these social transformations and changes in expectations occur? This is an open question when one looks at the history of societies, particularly because there is often a rift between the expectations that arise and the actual changes that come about through revolutions. The French Revolution of 1789 shattered the whole of Europe and led to transformations of political and social orders – as well as further revolutions in Europe (in 1830 and 1848), Latin America, and Russia (1917). Empires end – the Holy Roman Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the British Empire are good examples – yet they turn into new forms of social organization, which sometimes begin to resemble the old ones.

Our times are not different. Since 2011 the world has seen an explosion of popular uprisings that have spread across the Middle East and North Africa. Beginning in January with the ousting of Tunisian president Ben Ali and followed by Egypt's removal of Mubarak in February, these uprisings quickly spread globally. Old regimes were toppled and new regimes could be observed in the process of their germination. In between were various efforts to create democratic forms of governance – not an easy task in societies without a tradition of openness. Acceptance of the opponent's differing political perspective and the negotiation of power through elections have not easily taken root. The chaos of public life in most of these societies has been filled with various forms of protest, some of them associated with violent radical movements.

Protests are theatrical events. They are scripted through social representations of antagonism, claims for justice and fairness, and many other reasons that could get the public to legitimize the events. In our contemporary world, they are – more often than not – directed to television cameras and, through those, to audiences in countries far away.

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European countries saw widespread protests against governments' economic austerity programs as well for various political agendas, right or left.

In the US, the Occupy Wall Street movement emerged, followed by the readiness to "occupy Anyplace," as well as the right-wing Tea Party movement that would capture the attention of the mass media. Yet no revolution followed from these occupations. In a similar vein, Brazil experienced forceful protests leading up to the World Cup, which have intensified in the wake of widespread political scandals. Such scandals represent other forms of theatrical events in societies. Human participation in societies is organized by way of theatrical setups in the middle of ordinary living. Europe – free of wars on its territory since 1945 – participates vicariously in the conflicts in other parts of the world by observing atrocities shown on TV screens.

Social ruptures can escalate. Some recent unrests have proceeded to military conflicts and civil wars. Recent social power struggles in Ukraine, Syria, and Iraq have transformed into conflicts of devastating consequences, solutions for which are nowhere in sight. The transition from protest to military action is an orchestration skill that politicians learn by doing – and psychologists need to learn *before* politicians get involved in doing it.

### **Revolutions and Resolutions**

Most radical social changes – "revolutions" as they quickly became labeled – tend to rapidly lead to their opposite, transforming into the reinstatement of old orders. What creates the conditions for these social upheavals, what are the dynamics of their evolution, and why do they so often fail to bring about lasting changes? Furthermore, how are these large-scale social changes related to changes in individual lives and mentalities? These are key questions asked in this volume, answers to which are sought using theories and empirical research from psychological science, situated vis-à-vis other social sciences.

The word *revolution* is itself ambiguous, as it shares family resemblances with other terms (e.g., *uprising*, *coup d'état*, *revolt*, *insurgency*, *riot*, *protest*), making precise definitions difficult. These terms imply different kinds and levels of societal ruptures as well as different value orientations (Valsiner, Chapter 10). Many different conditions have to be in place for a revolution to occur, whereas the other terms can be seen as parts of or precursors to revolutions. After hearing of the storming of the Bastille on July 14, 1789, Louis XVI reportedly asked, "Is this a revolt?" to which Duc de la Rochefoucauld replied, "No, sire, it is a revolution."

A much more profound transformation of society was under way than Louis XVI had imagined. The most strict definitions of revolutions say there must be mass mobilization driven by a clear ideology that changes not only the nation's leadership but also its institutions, practices, and mentalities. Few events in history satisfy these requirements – perhaps only the French, Russian, Chinese, and Haitian revolutions. More often than not, we only find a change of leadership. Taking over the existing social power positions does not necessarily transform the given society. In fact, power transfers – even violent ones – preserve the rules by which power games are being enacted. Revolutions are *conservatively bordered* so that anarchy is curtailed.

Political theorists and historians have been at the forefront of investigating revolution. Although these analyses are essential and will be commented upon here, this should not lead to a neglect of the social and psychological processes involved. Revolutions are as much about ideas, mentalities, identities, habits, and group processes as they are about economics and political calculation. One of the first distinctly psychological theories of revolution was put forward by Gustav Le Bon in his famous *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (1896) and later *The Psychology of Revolution* (1912). Writing to understand the French Revolution and its aftermath, Le Bon formulated a theory that put collective mentalities and leader–crowd dynamics at its core (for more on Le Bon, see Chapters 2 and 5). This was followed by Ellwood (1905) and others, who saw revolution in terms of group habits and adaptability to new conditions.

This first wave of psychological theorists of revolution was largely ignored by the second wave that emerged in the 1960s. The most notable of these explained revolution through the lens of “relative deprivation” (see also Chapter 3). Davies (1962) argued that revolutions are not sparked by people living in poverty comparing themselves to those living in luxury but rather as a result of aggression following frustrated expectations. Revolutions are preceded by improvements that people expect will continue. When their situation declines, they are left with an “intolerable gap” between what they want and what they get. This is the moment in which a revolution occurs, not before. One of the major problems of this model is that it fails to explain how it works under different social-political conditions and leads to different revolutionary outcomes. A psychology that studies the emergence of revolutions needs to be contextual and developmental at its core.

More recently, social psychologists have made important contributions to a better understanding of intergroup conflict, through research on realistic conflict theory, system justification theory, social identity

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theory, self-categorization theory, social dominance theory, equity theory, relative deprivation theory, terror management theory, and various offshoots of psychodynamic theory (Moghaddam, 2008). A theme in this research since at least the 1980s has been experimental studies on rebellion and/or collective action in the face of perceived injustice (Wright, Taylor, and Moghaddam, 1990). One of the major challenges for social psychologists has been to better understand how people attempt to bring about change, and the psychology of change processes (see Chapters 2 and 13).

Central to both psychological science and revolution is change in the ways of being and feelings about such change. The latter particularly sets limits to the change. In assessing the psychology of change, a useful distinction has been made between three levels of systems (Moghaddam, 2013).

A first-order system is one in which both formal law and the informal normative system justify group-based injustices. Ancient Greek *polises* – based on slavery – included philosophical and rhetoric devices of legitimizing the differential power roles of social groups. The traditions of slavery in European colonial conquests can also be seen in the southern US until the mid-nineteenth century – until abolition of slavery.

The second-order system has a reformed formal law, but the informal normative system continues to justify group-based injustices. An example is the US when slavery became illegal, but discrimination against African Americans continued and was upheld by the informal normative system.

A third-order system is one in which both the formal law and the informal normative system support group-based justice. Such concordance can be found in some Occidental societies that have developed solid democratic governance systems under the conditions of relative economic prosperity. The Scandinavian countries of today are prime examples here. This is an ideal that many participants in revolutions strive for, but it is difficult for such a system to come out of the confrontational ethos of demolishing “the old regimes” that is usual in revolutions.

The changes brought about by most revolutions are within-system, not between-system. In practice, this leads, as predicted by elite theory (Pareto, 1935), to cycles of counterelite revolution being followed by the counterelite becoming the new elite and simply continuing to rule in the same way. The king is dead, long live the king! The Shah is overthrown, long reign the Supreme Leader! Mubarak is gone, hoorah for El Sisi! Pareto (1935) warns us not to be misled by rhetoric and labels, but to

notice the continuity of elite rule over the nonelite, even though the new regime has changed the official rhetoric and now refers to the nation as “communist” or “Islamic Republic” or “democracy.” From a psychological perspective, the central concern here is continuity in behavior patterns, reflecting limits to what in contemporary terminology is political plasticity (Moghaddam, 2016) but was discussed earlier by Pareto (1935) and other elite theorists using a different terminology. Thus, in a sense the chapters in this volume are building on a long line of research on limits and possibilities to dramatic social and behavioral change.

### Preview of the Book

This book explores the different social-psychological conditions and processes leading up to revolutions (Part I), the different trajectories they take (Part II) and the dynamics by which they are represented to the public and would-be revolutionaries (Part III). It outlines continuities and discontinuities between present and past revolutions and uprisings, through focused analyzes of contextualized single cases. In-depth analysis of the following events are presented: French Revolution (1789), Russian Revolution (1917), North Korean Revolution (1945–1950), Iranian Revolution (1979), Velvet Revolution (1989), Hyde Park Riot (1994), Greek protests (2008), the Arab Spring (2011), Occupy Movement (2011), and Irish antiausterity protests (2014). This is by no means a complete survey of revolutions and collective movements around the world (e.g., it leaves out Latin America). But it is sufficient to draw out what new factors, such as global capitalism, the Internet and mass media, are changing the form of revolution today as well as the conditions that have remained important through the ages.

Part I, “Roots of Revolution,” focuses on crowds and economic processes as conditions for revolutions, as well as global processes that neutralize them. Revolutions are rare, but precursors to them can be found in the wider phenomena of protests and collective action, which are often closely connected to economic policies and developments. Protests against fiscal strain and injustice can turn into revolutions when particular conditions are in place, such as an alienated elite that connects with the populace and provides a persuasive narrative of resisting the current system. Along these lines, major theories of crowds, collective action, relative deprivation, collective memory, globalization, and social identity are covered in this section. Contrary to Le Bon’s arguments about the conservative crowd, Drury and Reicher (Chapter 2) describe how crowds can and have contributed to both social and psychological change. They develop a social identity theory of crowds, which they

illustrate with the case of antiroad building protests that took place in London in the 1990s. Power (Chapter 3) then explores what factors motivate people to go out and protest in the first place, elaborating “relative deprivation” explanations with the contextual approaches of cultural psychology and collective memory. Moghaddam (Chapter 4) then asks the same question from the opposite side: why do we not find revolutions in capitalist democracies given growing wealth inequalities? He points out a number of factors created by globalization that neutralize such movements. The commentary chapter by Wagoner (Chapter 5) connects the three chapters by re-situating crowd theory within the context of cultural and economic globalization. He considers the epidemiology of revolutions – that is, how they spread to other countries, as happened in 1848, 1989, 2011, and more recently with the so-called Islamic State.

Part II, “Evolution and Involution in Social Transformations,” focuses on forces driving changes in society and their relation to those that lead to reinstatement of earlier structures. It provides analyses of the dialectics of plasticity and rigidity on and between social-political and psychological levels. Case studies of the Russian Revolution, Iranian Revolution, Velvet Revolution, and French Revolution illustrate the dynamics between the two levels. The section raises the questions of the limits and possibilities of “social engineering” (Chapter 6), why so often revolutions fail to bring about lasting change, including the role of leadership (Moghaddam, Chapter 7), how revolutions shape individual life trajectories (Zittoun, Chapter 8), and what factors lead to “radicalization” in times of revolution (Wu, Chapter 9). The commentary chapter by Valsiner (Chapter 10) “Between the Guillotine and the Velvet Revolution: What Is at Stake?” combines the case studies to develop a general model that incorporates them all and explains the complex interrelationship between stability and change on individual and group levels.

Part III, “Representations of and in Revolution,” then explores some ways in which revolution is communicated and represented to audiences that are both local and international, during and after its occurrence. An important influence on revolutions is the support, or none-interference, of international actors. Protests and revolutions involve active communication to bolster one's cause as well as countermessaging to delegitimize collective actions by representing them as “pathology” (Bozatzis and Teliou, Chapter 12). The media-saturated world of today includes both traditional media outlets, such as newspaper and television, as well as new media, such as Facebook and Twitter, which has been effectively used in recent revolutions especially the Arab Spring. We can also point to age-old devices of resistance such as graffiti and urban performances

(Awad and Wagoner, Chapter 11). This section considers the image politics of urban spaces and their transnational diffusion (Awad and Wagoner, Chapter 11), media coverage of protest and revolt (Bozatzis and Teliou, Chapter 12), and how individuals construct stable identities through cultural means taken over from one group, especially historical narratives including heroes and pivotal events (de la Sablonnière, Taylor, and Caron-Diotte, Chapter 13). It thus moves from how revolutionary events are collectively represented to how individuals negotiate these representations. The commentary by Moghaddam (Chapter 14) outlines two general behavioral styles of revolutionary movements, which he calls the “shark” (expansionist) and the “octopus” (inward looking).

The world of today is filled with social tensions that at times lead to sudden ruptures – revolts, revolutions, and other forms of upsets to our mundane established ways of being. Psychology and other social sciences need to be on the forefront in making sense of the basic social processes that lead to these eruptions. Well-being and at times lives are at stake. Science here needs to be ahead of politics in such dramatic social moments. The material included in this volume is intended to provide some leads to that objective.

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