

25 Years of Revolution

Thinking through Revolutions: Comparative Narratives

International politics, frameworks for analysis. Is Social Revolution Possible in the 21st-century?

Neil Davidson

Social and political theorists have tended to divide revolutions into those which are 'political', resulting in a change of leadership *within* the state, but leaving society untouched, and those which are 'social' and result in a transformation *of* the state *and* society. The latter type, particularly in Marxist versions of the political/social distinction, can take either bourgeois (France) Revolution) or socialist (Russian) forms.

The concept of bourgeois revolution, has been attacked a 'revisionism' which seeks to deny that (e.g.) the French Revolution involved any significant social change, shifting attention instead to longer-term processes of capitalist development. Similarly, the socialist revolution is now treated as an aberration, apparently reversed by the events of 1989-91 and the Chinese embrace of neo-liberalism. One popular conclusion is that the idea of social revolution has always been illusionary; the only possibility is political revolution on the model of the Arab Spring.

This paper argues that such a conclusion would be over hasty. The turn to political revolution actually began, not in 1989, but a decade earlier with the Nicaraguan and—especially—Iranian Revolutions, after the completion of the bourgeois revolution on a global scale and the undermining of the socialist idea by Stalinist experience. The experience of Egypt in particular shows that the objective possibility of social revolution remains, but that it requires some sense of a viable alternative other than 'democracy' if it is to be realised.

'Revolution as Secular Miracle: The Political Theologies of 1989 and the "Arab Spring"'

Tim Beasley-Murray

As the rationale for this conference indicates, commentators have remarked upon similarities that exist between the revolutionary events of 1989 in Central and Eastern Europe and the revolutionary events that have gripped the Arab world since 2011. A casual observer might expect, however, also to find a key difference: in the reasonably secularized heart of Europe one would not expect religion to play much of a political role; and, on the contrary, in the Islamic world, one would expect religion to be a source of political mobilization. While more recent events in Egypt may go against this, it is nevertheless of interest that such expectations have, in general, been misplaced: in Central and Eastern Europe, religion – whether the deeply held Christian convictions of the strikers in the Gdansk dockyards or in the religious sensibility that underlay Havel's philosophical conception of dissent – was at the core of the political imagination. In the Arab Spring of 2011, a largely secular understanding of the political came to the fore. This paper will examine the political

theology of revolutionary thinking: it will look, at a theoretical level, at the conception of revolution as miracle that can be put together by examining thinkers such as Havel, Patocka, Arendt and Carl Schmitt. It will go on to explore the key function of this political theology in 1989 and suggest reasons why political theology has been largely absent in the Arab Spring.

Human Rights Revolutions?: From the End of Communism to the Arab Spring

Ned Richardson-Little

During the intensive media coverage of the burgeoning Arab Spring in early 2010, a common theme in Western media was that of the repeat of history: Just as Eastern Europeans discovered human rights in the 1970s and 1980s, so too had now Middle East. Yet, these narratives obscured the complexities of human rights ideas in both 1989 and in the present. Although the idea of human rights had not automatically and inevitably inspired movements for liberal democratic capitalism in the Soviet Bloc, in retrospect this became a dominant historical interpretation. When applied to the Arab Spring, this narrative frame created the false impression of a unifying political and economic program held by a monolithic “Arab” fight for human rights against nebulous oppressors.

In 1989, the idea of human rights was taken up by a broad coalition with modest goals focused on political and economic liberalization, while for others it meant the hope of a democratic socialism. The diversity of human rights discourses within the Arab Spring is even more complex. While human rights represented a unifying discourse against the abuses of dictatorships, monarchies, and militaries, the post-revolutionary meaning of human rights – particularly in relation to the meaning of democracy, religious freedom, and gender equality – has been fiercely contested. As the Syrian Civil War continues and Egypt sits at the brink, it is time to reconsider the simplicities of the human rights narrative both for the Arab Spring and 1989.

Reassessing Czechoslovakia’s 1989 Revolution

David Green

Research into Czechoslovakia’s 1989 revolution remains one the majorly overlooked revolutions within the English-language historiography. Even when considering Czech and Slovak publications, historians have focussed on the role of dissident-led opposition groups, students and ‘people power’ in overthrowing the Czechoslovak Communist Party (Komunistická strana Československa, or KSČ). This paper takes this imbalance as a starting point and asserts that the KSČ and its associated institutions are crucial to understanding how the political events over November and December 1989 unfolded in Czechoslovakia. Based on original archival research, this paper argues that the 1989 revolution is best understood through how the Communist Party lost power, rather than how the masses won it. The loss of power can be traced back to much overlooked reforms which the Party leadership introduced during the late 1980s (including freedom of assembly and dropping the Party’s ‘leading role’ in society). Local, regional and state archives show how the reforms created tensions and divisions between local Communist Party members and the KSČ leadership, which ultimately led to paralysis within the KSČ. Communist-controlled state institutions and organisations, were also affected by the reforms, with most people within them interpreting the reforms as a chance to demand greater freedom from the KSČ leadership. When revolution began in November 1989, these two phenomena combined not just to undermine the KSČ’s authority, but to form a coalition in favour of reform and, ultimately, revolution.

The Primacy of Stability: Central Asia, the Soviet Collapse and the Arab Spring

Luca Anceschi

In 1990-1991, when the Soviet Union was approaching its demise, the Central Asian leaders aligned to the most conservative forces in the collapsing USSR. In 2010-2011, facing the wave of political upheaval that swept the Arab world, political élites in the region adopted similar postures of resistance to change.

This paper is designed to highlight analogies and differences in the political statements and operational policies that two Central Asian leaders – Kazakhstan’s Nursultan A. Nazarbaev and Uzbekistan’s Islam A. Karimov – issued and implemented while framing a response to traumatic instances of change that had been occurring in their (more or less) immediate neighbourhood. Focus on these leaders is not accidental, as both Nazarbaev and Karimov were in charge of their respective political systems in 1990-1991 as well as 2010-2011.

Ultimately, this paper will address two distinct (yet not unrelated) analytical issues, to further our understanding of Central Asia’s authoritarian dynamics. On the one hand, it will highlight how Central Asia’s technologies of power have not substantially changed throughout two last two decades, as the political priorities of new leaderships – like those that ruled Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in the late Soviet era – seem to coincide with the power considerations of today’s more established regimes. On the other, the paper will attempt to capture any significant evolution in the regime’s assessment of political instability sparked by popular uprisings or systemic crises – specifically those experienced by the Arab republics in 2010-11 and the Soviet Union in 1990-1991.

Martyrs of revolutions

Ieva Zakareviciute

Heroic acts, sacrifices and martyrdom for one’s country are a few of the tombstones in nationalistic movements in recent history. The heroic acts of martyrs are recounted and recited repeatedly within communities, and their representation becomes a strong element in nationalistic narratives, while martyrs themselves become unifying symbols of the nation and common goals.

The role of *shahid* (martyr) is prominent in the narratives of the 25th of January revolution in Egypt. These deaths and their commemoration became both a cause generating societal outrage towards the regime and an inspirational example of revolutionary acts. Tributes to the martyrs are still being paid in a variety of revolutionary mediums, from poetry to graffiti.

Similarly, the martyrs of the January Events in 1991 in Lithuania became crucial symbols in the official nationalistic narrative after the reestablishment of the state. Their role of “national hero” was established through honours given to them after their deaths, multiple memorials, and naming streets after them.

I seek to explore how stories of martyrs in both revolutions were constructed to gain the greatest appeal, what forms they took, and how they were propagated through various means of communication and were discussed in these media. Analyzing examples from each revolution, I

examine the stories of a few martyrs that had to challenge arguments contradicting them, and how eventually, they were absorbed into dominating nationalistic narratives. Finally, I observe how different groups within society *post factum* try impose their identities on the martyrs, and how these representations become a resource to gain symbolic power.

Representations of the Middle East: National values and Russian state media

Emma Heywood

Situating its analysis in the interval between the 1989 anti-Soviet uprisings and the 2011 Arab Spring, this paper examines how Russian state media coverage of the Middle East (2006-08) does not only report the events but also reveals specific national values as the state establishes an international and diplomatic role for itself in the post-9/11 and post-Cold War era. It discusses representations of specific flashpoints and uprisings in the Middle East conflict and the reaction of Russia's state-aligned media, represented by Channel 1's *Vremya*, to the apparent realities of events and their causes, protagonists and proposed solutions. The findings are supported by comparative research into similar coverage by France's *20 Heures* and UK's *News at Ten*, both public broadcasters. This is used to emphasise how, in portrayals of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, Russian state media is widely employed as a propaganda tool as part of Putin's nation-building campaign.

The paper examines the coverage from the theoretical perspective of news values and agenda-setting. By focusing on these two areas - which influence the shaping, length and positioning of broadcasts - news reports can be analysed both quantitatively (e.g. running order, airtime, number of items per programme and subject matter) and qualitatively, (e.g. the portrayal of news values and agenda-setting attributes displayed) illustrating nationally specific portrayals of the Middle East in this post 9/11 and post-communist phase. This paper provides a useful point of reference for subsequent research into post-Arab Spring studies and its representation by Russian national media.

"Addressing the World:" Comparative Perspectives on International Audiences, Political Protest, and Revolutionary Change

Robert Brier

My paper discusses the role international audiences played in the revolution of 1989 and provides a comparative perspective on the Arab spring. Research on human rights activism and transnational advocacy networks has shown how protesters raise international awareness for their cause in order to create solidarity and exert pressure on their governments. Yet insufficient attention is being paid to how the need to "address the world" may shape the protesters' message or even their political identity. My paper therefore shows how East-Central European dissidents drew on the support of intermediaries like western correspondents, émigré groups, or advocacy organizations to reach audiences in the West. This was important for three reasons: first, like boomerangs, texts published in the West returned to the East via western broadcasters and thus allowed to break the state's information monopoly; second, through western media, émigré communities, and direct contacts, a transnational dissident community was created lending weight to protest in individual countries; third, human rights abuses were brought onto the agenda of international meetings CSCE or transnational advocacy group thus creating international pressure

on Communist governments. Yet the need to address western audiences also created problems: western attention could not be taken for granted and western actors could have agendas different from those of the dissidents. Were the latter thus forced to adjust their message to western expectations? And, if so, was this a mere tactical move or was the dissidents' political program shaped by western expectations? In my conclusions, I will discuss the wider theoretical implications of my research in order to identify factors indicating that similar processes may have been at work during the Arab spring.

Revolutionary Situations and International Relations

Derya Göçer Akder and Zelal Ozdamir Samur, presented by Zelal Ozdemir Samur

This paper will look at the lessons of recent uprisings in the Middle East with regards to the theories of revolutions. Within the wider theoretical debate of the causes, processes and outcomes of revolutions the paper will focus on the international political dimensions of the revolutionary situations as distinct from the revolutionary outcomes. An effort will be made to disentangle the international politics surrounding these revolutionary situations. The paper will propose a rough framework of analysis of international politics in revolutionary situations by drawing on not only on the Arab uprisings but also on the Turkish experiences in the region. The framework argues that the role of the international should be neither downplayed nor exaggerated at the expense of domestic agency, and combines structure and agency in an attempt to build a conjunctural understanding of international factors in revolutionary situations. In studying a region where the involvement of international factors during periods of domestic political change is complex, we need the same complexity in our frameworks of analysis and such frameworks will contribute to comparative studies of revolutionary situations.

Constitutions that Suppress Constitutional Democracy: The Experience of the Post-Tyrannical Middle East

Feisal Amin Rasoul al-Istrabadi

After the fall of long-lived despotic regimes in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the attention of national and international actors was immediately focused on the drafting of permanent constitutions. Yet the fundamental problem in such societies is not the constitutional text per se. It is the absence of institutions on which to build a new constitutional order. By focusing on the constitution, the first elections, often for a constituent assembly, become winner-take-all events, with the new and often transitory majority drafting a constitution protecting itself, rather than engendering genuine constitutional democracy and a national compact. National, religious, racial, and political minorities are sacrificed, and the new constitution becomes highly divisive and contentious. This has been the unfortunate experience in multiple MENA countries (Egypt, Libya, Iraq, etc.), whose experiences will be compared.

This paper argues that MENA states emerging from tyranny err in making the drafting of a permanent constitution an early priority. In such traumatized societies, politics in any meaningful sense have long ceased to operate. Consequently, the post-regime elites are typically highly suspicious of one another. The prospect of drafting a permanent constitution serves only to exacerbate tensions and increase distrust. Compromise is not in the air and state instability often results. Instead, the new elites should focus on issues likely to create common ground, such as the

management of existing vital national resources, e.g., water. This process would likely lead to compromise and promote a modus vivendi. Only after stable political institutions emerge should these newly-emergent democracies draft a new permanent constitution.

Personnel Change or Personal Change? Alternatives to Political Isolation Law in Libya

Roman David

Personnel reform of the state apparatus is one of the most critical issues of democratic consolidation. However, the topic has been rather neglected in the academic literature, which is unable to provide policy advice on viable alternatives to political exclusions. In order to fill this gap, this paper uses the Political Isolation Law in Libya as an example of the exclusive system and compares its capacity to reform the state apparatus with a reconciliatory personnel model that conceptually draws on the Polish model of lustration and the South African process of qualified amnesty. While the former facilitates a broad personnel change, the latter is based on the second chance, which accentuates a personal change. This paper then assesses both models against five theory-driven criteria: building a trustworthy state apparatus, reconciliation, justice, human rights and a contagion effect on other countries. The assessment draws on the results of survey experiments conducted on the utility of exclusive and reconciliatory systems in Central Europe. It is demonstrated that the Political Isolation Law can be effective only under particular conditions in two criteria, while the alternative reconciliatory model can fulfill all five of them.

The role of civil society in democracy building and transition processes after 'colour revolutions' and the Arab Spring: comparative study on the example of Ukraine, Georgia, Tunisia and Egypt

Asya Kudlenko

Despite the fact that neither the colour revolutions that hit several post-Soviet and Balkan states at the beginning of the century, nor protests in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, that followed soon after, have brought any radical changes to the deeply flawed governmental regimes of the countries affected, it is too early to dismiss these uprisings as absolutely ineffective and fruitless. The processes of democracy building and democratic transition require time to take root, which means there is still considerable potential for change in both of the regions. This paper will examine how this potential is exploited by civil society as one of the most active agents of democratisation in the post-revolutionary settings. It will look at the contributions made by civil society organisations (CSOs) towards a smooth transition to democracy prior, during and after the 'colour revolutions' and the Arab Spring. Special emphasis will be placed on the comparative component of the study which will help to define similarities and differences behind failures as well as successes displayed by Eastern European and Arab CSOs in the process of democracy consolidation. The work will also touch upon the short- and long-term impact the civil society can have on the development of the two regions, and the influence of external support on its dynamics.