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Revolutions: Moments and Movements in Historical Perspective

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Revolutions

Moments and Movements in Historical Perspective

A Symposium in Comparative History

Thursday, 6 February 2020, 5:30pm
Bethany Hall A
Keynote Address:
Ervand Abrahamian
Baruch College, CUNY

Friday, 7 February 2020
9:30am—5:30pm
Panels: Faculty Lounge
University Center

The event is free and open to the public.



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Revolutions: Moments and Movements in Historical Perspective

Sixth Annual Symposium in Comparative History
Seton Hall University, Department of History
February 6-7, 2020



What is a Revolution? Historians have used the term broadly to describe movements resulting in the toppling of regimes and establishment of new social and political orders, yet much remains unclear. Are revolutions an intrinsically modern phenomenon, or can the concept be productively applied to events in the ancient and medieval worlds? Can revolutions be clearly bounded in time? How do they begin and end? Is there a common trajectory? When and why do revolutions arise in interrelated clusters? However we choose to answer such questions, the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall and recent events, from the Arab Spring to the riots in Hong Kong, remind us that revolutions, whether a cause of hope or trepidation, have lost none of their force and relevance.

This symposium will consider revolutions broadly in their social, cultural, and intellectual origins and ramifications, examining the interactions of ideologies, structures, pivotal moments, and social and political movements.

Thursday, February 6, Bethany Hall A

5:30-7:00 **Keynote address:**
Ervand Abrahamian
Baruch College, The City University of New York
The Iranian Revolution of 1979: Not for Export

7:45-10:00 Dinner: Office Tavern Grill (Summit, NJ)

Friday, February 7, Faculty Lounge, University Center

8:45-9:30 Coffee and Introductions

9:30-11:00 **Interpreting Revolution**
Moderator: Thomas Rzeknik, Seton Hall University

Anna Vincenzi, University of Notre Dame
*The Re-Invention of "Revolution": How the Age of Revolution
Gave "Revolution" a New Meaning*

Tracey Rizzo, University of North Carolina—Asheville
Gendered Bodies in Times of Revolutions

Naira Sahakyan, University of Amsterdam
*Revolution, Freedom, and Imamate in the Revolutionary
Discourse of the Muslim Reformists of Daghestan*

11:00-11:15 Coffee Break

11:15-12:45 **Revolutionary Violence**
Moderator: Maxim Matusevich, Seton Hall University

Benjamin L. Carp, Brooklyn College and the Graduate
Center, City University of New York
*The Radical Fringe of the American Revolution: Perpetrators of
the New York City Fire of 1776*

Domenico Maria Bruni, Luiss Guido Carli — Rome
*A Conservative Revolution? The Italian Risorgimento
Reconsidered*

Aldo Garcia-Guevara, Worcester State University
*Representations and Realities of Women, Gender, and
Revolution in Central America and the Caribbean*

12:45-1:45 **Lunch Break**

1:45-3:15 **Appropriating Revolution**
Moderator: Golbarg Rekabtalaei, Seton Hall University

Miguel Durango Loaiza, University of Pennsylvania
*The Effects of the Haitian Revolution in the Province of
Riohacha*

Peyman Jafari, Princeton University
*The Iranian Revolution and Social Theory: Towards an
Epistemology of the Possible*

Howard Eissenstat, St. Lawrence University
*How Revolutionary is Erdogan's Revolution? Assessing What is
New and What is Not in the "New Turkey"*

3:15-3:30 Coffee Break

3:30-5:30 **Roundtable Discussion and Closing Remarks**
Moderators: Ervand Abrahamian, Baruch College, The
City University of New York, and Nathaniel Knight,
Seton Hall University

6:00-8:30 Dinner: Boccone South (South Orange, NJ)

Keynote Address

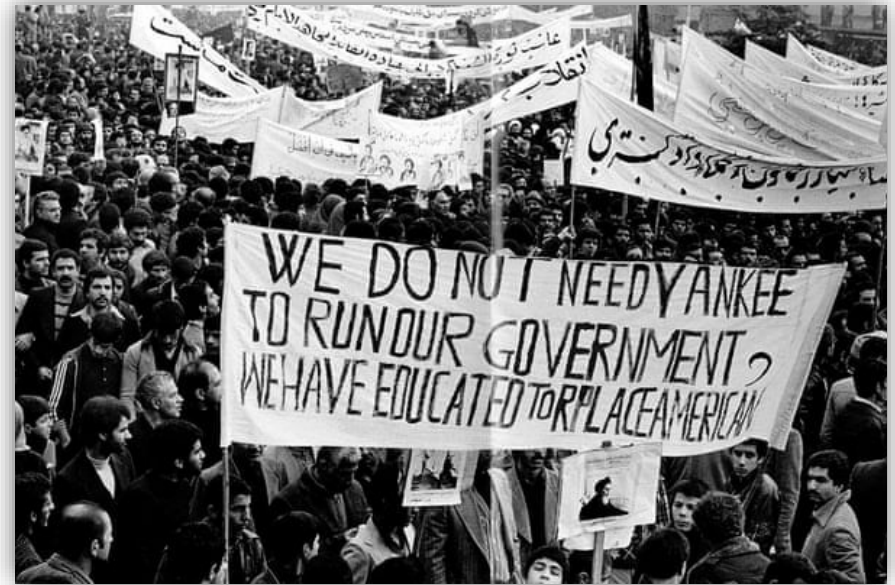
5:30–7:00 PM , Bethany Hall, Room A

The Iranian Revolution of 1979: Not For Export

Dr. Ervand Abrahamian

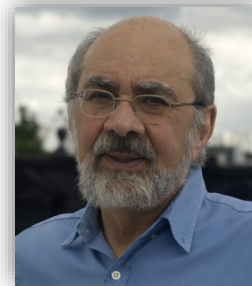
Baruch College, The City University of New York

The overthrow of the Shah in 1979 qualifies as a true revolution comparable to the classic few – the English, French, Russian, and Chinese and Cuban Revolutions. It was more than a revolt or uprising, a palace or military coup, or collapse of a regime. On the contrary, a mass protest movement succeeded in bring about fundamental changes in the country's political, social, ideological, and even cultural structures. Despite these dramatic and drastic changes, it—unlike the other major revolutions—failed to have much resonance outside its own borders, including in the neighboring Arab World. The talk will try to explain both why the revolution was historically and academically significant and why it paradoxically failed to have much impact outside Iran – in other words why it was not a revolution for export.



Iran, 1979.

Photograph by Miryam Zandi, Wikimedia Commons



Ervand Abrahamian (B.A, Oxford University. Ph.D., Columbia University) is a historian of the Middle East specializing in modern Iran. He has taught at the universities of Oxford, Columbia, New York, and Princeton, in addition to the Graduate Center in the City University of New York and over forty years at Baruch College.

His book publications include: *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton University Press); *The Iranian Mujahedin* (Yale University Press); *Khomeinism* (University of California Press); *Tortured Confessions* (University of California Press); *A History of Modern Iran* (Cambridge University Press); and *The Coup: 1953, The CIA, and the Roots of Modern US-Iran Relations* (New Press). His books have also been published in Persian, Arabic, Turkish, Polish, and Italian. He is now working on a book on the 1979 revolution in Iran.

Session 1

Interpreting Revolution

Anna Vincenzi, University of Notre Dame

The Re-Invention of “Revolution”: How the Age of Revolution Gave “Revolution” a New Meaning

This paper explores how the meaning of “revolution” changed over the course of the so-called “Age of Revolution,” by analyzing interpretations of the American Revolution in the Italian states and how those interpretations evolved between the 1770s and 1790s. It shows that the journalists, diplomats, and political thinkers of the Italian states initially did not understand the American Revolution as a “revolution” at all, at least not in the modern sense of the term. They did not interpret the American Revolution as an invitation to tear down the edifice of the Old Regime. They understood the American Revolution as the apex of an age of imperial reform, not as the beginning of a revolutionary age. For the notion of an “Age of Revolution” to emerge, the French Revolution had to happen, introducing a radically new notion of “revolution”—revolutionary change as a radical break from the past and an occasion to establish a new, truly egalitarian and democratic society. It was only in the 1790s that the American experience entered “revolutionary” discourse and that the people of the Italian states (and beyond) came to see revolution and reform as mutually exclusive. On this basis, my paper criticizes narratives of the “Age of Revolution” that present the Age as a single process originating from North America. Instead, I call attention to what seems to be the true core of the Age—the invention of a new model of “revolution”—and I recast Paris as the birthplace of that model.

Tracey Rizzo, University of North Carolina—Asheville

Gendered Bodies in Times of Revolutions

Delacroix’s “Liberty Leading the People” outraged contemporaries who either embraced or rejected the July 1830 revolution in Paris. Her “tarnished skin” and “robust breasts” located her as a rude and filthy woman of the people, a prostitute for her occupation of public space. “What was she doing there?” remains an oft asked question about revolutionaries. In 2011, a protester in Cairo’s Tahrir Square, covered by her abaya, was dragged into the street exposing her torso. Eroticized and infantilized as the “blue bra girl” in international media, she became a symbol of the people’s vulnerability before a brutal military force. Thus bookended, this paper will review gendered representations of revolutionaries from the hypermasculine warrior to the lactating mother. The power of images to inspire violent action knits revolutionary moments together and reminds us to take a comparative and historical approach to our study of them. As Baker and Edelstein argue in *Scripting Revolution*, revolutionaries adopt the tropes of previous revolutions. As recently as this Fall, Hong Kongers deployed gendered and familiar tropes. “Some heads need to roll,” said Emily Lau of Hong Kong’s Democratic Party in June, calling for Chief Executive Carrie Lam’s ouster. Lam said earlier that, as the “mother of Hong Kong,” she could not indulge the whims of her children. Meanwhile

protestors lionize the warrior ethos of Bruce Lee to “be water” and call for an “eye for an eye” after police wounded a young nurse, herself now an icon donning an eye patch. If the past is prologue, we must study the dangers and possibilities of exploiting and enacting gender in times of revolution as a script or guide to our own turbulent times.

Naira Sahakyan, University of Amsterdam

Revolution, Freedom, and Imamate in the Revolutionary Discourse of the Muslim Reformists of Daghestan

The Russian Revolution of 1917 created a disjunctive break and an opportunity for opening a new page in the history of Daghestan. The Daghestani Reformists’ discourse on the future of the country in the post-revolutionary period took advantage of this break by creating its own rationale and defined the new era by rejecting the established political beliefs of the collapsed empire. Shari’a justice (al-’adala) together with calls for social “freedom” (hurriyya) and “equality” (musawa) became one of the most famous slogans of different political groups in the region, including the Reformists and the Bolsheviks. Since every group had its own understanding of the concepts, in Daghestan it became not only one of the most important in the Revolutionary lexicon but also a major source of ambiguity. Being influenced by the ideas such as constitutionalism and democracy, circulating between the Russian and the Ottoman Empires, the reformists formed their imaginations about freedom. My paper examines the reformists’ perception of the 1917 Revolution, putting it in the broader context of the crossing empires and transition of the ideas. Particularly, it would discuss the questions How did the Daghestani reformists become part of the Revolutionary discourse of freedom? How did the global revolutionary waves on the one hand, and local historical and cultural constraints on the other shape the revolutionary perception of the Daghestani reformists? Why and how did the imagination about ideal model of state change from Islamic imamate to the parliamentary state in the context of the revolutionary dynamics of the beginning of the twentieth century?



Eugène Delacroix,
La liberté guidant le peuple.
Wikimedia Commons

Session 2

Revolutionary Violence

Benjamin L. Carp, Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York
The Radical Fringe of the American Revolution: Perpetrators of the New York City Fire of 1776

Revolutionary Manhattan was at the center of a violent and uncertain civil war, the factious process of nation-making and state formation, and the clash of armies that didn't always act in accordance with Enlightenment ideals. Most British and Loyalist observers believed the Americans deliberately sabotaged the city six days after the British occupied it: they apprehended dozens of people tampering with firefighting equipment or carrying incendiary materials. In a few cases the British soldiers executed them on the spot. Afterward, the patriot press claimed it was an accident, and most historians have followed their lead. Yet I argue that American rebels did burn the city. Although it's possible that George Washington gave them his blessing, they probably would have defied their own officers, regardless. Their aim was to target a British garrison and naval base, wealthy Loyalist property-owners, and the Church of England. Washington later shied away from such destruction, but for New York, the damage was already done. This paper examines the alleged perpetrators of the fire. The "first incendiary" was a woman. Another was a "mulatto" man who may have been Pequot. The accused men also included New England Congregationalists, a Scots-Irish Presbyterian, and a New York City tavernkeeper. Together, the incendiaries' social profile may provide a clue to understanding radical elements within the broader Revolutionary movement.

Domenico Maria Bruni, Luiss Guido Carli—Rome
A Conservative Revolution? The Italian Risorgimento Reconsidered

The Italian Risorgimento was the set of events which realized the transition from the ancient regime state to the modern constitutional state on the Italian Peninsula. This was possible through a process of territorial unification. In such a process, nationalism played a major role as an actual driving force in order to delegitimize traditional institutions and sources of power, legitimize the use of verbal and physical violence against the traditional political order, and mobilize people. The success of the Italian Risorgimento implied: 1) The subversion of the post-Napoleonic settlement; 2) A clear change in the balance of power between Austria and France; 3) The end of the centuries-old state fragmentation of the Italian Peninsula; 4) The end of the temporal power of the Holy See. For all these reasons, the Italian Risorgimento has to be considered actually a revolutionary event. Yet the social and political elite, which led it and accomplished it, always protested all these changes were made in order to avoid the outburst of any revolution. This paper aims at analyzing the reasons of such a contradiction. In doing so, it will show that its dissolution was the result of the ability of a socially and culturally homogenous elite in gaining credit as the ablest group both in managing violence, and in fully exploiting the interaction between national ideological thrust and international political conjuncture.

Aldo Garcia-Guevara, Worcester State University
Representation and Realities of Women, Gender, and Revolution in Central America and the Caribbean

In the revolutionary movements of Cuba, Nicaragua and El Salvador, revolutionary leaders used the suffering of women to demonize their opponents, and tie them to global structures of exploitation. By focusing on particular forms of gendered violence and exploitation, whether it was the sexual exploitation of Cuban women by U.S. soldiers, or torture in El Salvador, or the particular impact of disappeared children on mothers, revolutionary rhetoric and imagery feminized imperial exploitation. Policy responses varied, from promoting women's work in Cuba, to promoting women in politics or issues of domestic violence in Nicaragua and El Salvador, but the empowerment of women was rhetorically and symbolically integral to all three struggles. Although in the long run, the status of women in contemporary El Salvador is distressing, in Nicaragua the situation has deteriorated and in Cuba, reality has not met revolutionary rhetoric, women in the revolutionary movements brought policy change and reframed the symbols and idea of a revolutionary society away from exclusively masculine representations.

Session 3

Appropriating Revolution

Miguel Durango Loaiza, University of Pennsylvania
The Effects of the Haitian Revolution in the Province of Riohacha

The Haitian Revolution was one of the most radical challenges in the Age of Revolutions. It is not surprising, therefore, that a great number of historical investigations have analyzed its development and impact throughout the globe. These studies have shown how, behind apparently uniform processes, there is a great diversity of interests and factors at play. It is important to observe, nevertheless, that, in this field of research, the majority of studied groups have belonged to plantation economies or have been societies majorly made up of whites and African descents. The effects of the Revolution in societies with strong indigenous presence have not been studied in such depth. This is an important oversight, given that indigenous were key agents who controlled almost half of American territories and who became involved in revolutionary processes of the period. I will analyze how the revolutionary processes in Saint-Domingue affected Riohacha, a province with a significant indigenous population. The power of the Crown in this region was scarce and the Spanish authorities were confronted by 'Guajiros,' a strong indigenous group who put colonial stability at risk, thanks to their ability to adapt foreign technologies to their trading relations with other European powers. This article seeks to widen the notion of 'impact' when thinking about the Haitian Revolution, by emphasizing the economic dimension, and not only the political. As this paper will demonstrate, the principal impact of the Revolution in the region was the increase of trade—both licit and illicit—with Saint-Domingue.

Peyman Jafari, Princeton University

The Iranian Revolution and Social Theory: Towards an Epistemology of Revolution

As one of the “great revolutions” of the twentieth century, the Iranian Revolution has played an important role in the theoretical thinking on revolutions, as reflected, for instance, in the Theda Skocpol’s historical sociology, Michel Foucault’s “political spirituality,” and Charles Kurtzman’s “anti-explanation.” In this paper, I revisit the historiography of the Iranian Revolution and identifies a number of salient controversies that are relevant to theoretical understandings of revolutions in general. Drawing on my research on the role of oil workers during the Iranian Revolution, the paper addresses the following issues. First, while recognizing the importance of “unevenness” (Ervand Abrahamian) and the “international” (Farideh Farhi), I argue that the approach of “uneven and combined development” provides a better understanding of the causes, dynamics, and outcomes of the Iranian Revolution. Secondly, I argue that it is important to historicize the mechanisms through which unevenness and combinations emerge and give rise to hybrid formations. The uneven geographical development of the oil industry and the impact of uneven migration are used as examples to demonstrate how hybrid labor relations and worker-subjectivities emerged in the oil industry. Thirdly, I argue that the outcome of the Iranian Revolution wasn’t decided by “Islam,” but that by a contingent political contestation between the different actors. This point is illustrated by the examination of the role and dynamics of the oil strikes during the revolution in relation to the political institutions that emerged out of it. Finally, I argue that revolutions are characterized by a subjective rupture, in which the notion of possibility plays a central role as new conditions emerge rapidly and transform the nature of grievances and imagined alternatives.

Howard Eissenstat, St. Lawrence University

How Revolutionary is Erdogan’s Revolution? Assessing What is New and What is Not in the “New Turkey”

That the Justice and Development Party (AKP), under the leadership of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has revolutionary ambitions is hardly a question: the transformation of Turkish culture and institutions has been an explicit goal for many years (even if the content of that revolution has often shifted). Since the attempted military coup of 2016, these efforts have become far more tangible. In contrast to the slow assimilation of institutions that marked the AKP’s first fourteen years in power, the coup provided Erdogan with a clear rationale for an accelerated crackdown on opposition and the rapid reconstruction of the state. Within days of the coup, tens of thousands, and then hundreds of thousands, of politically suspect functionaries were replaced by party loyalists. Within a year, the government pushed through a referendum that greatly extended centralized control and handed Erdogan a presidential system that allowed him unprecedented power to reshape the country. This reconstruction has been felt in every aspect of society, from the schools to public squares, to Turkey’s relationship with longtime allies. This paper attempts to provide a broader assessment of Erdogan’s revolution. In particular, it aims to tease out the

ways in which his rule reflects a real break from Turkey’s Republican past and, perhaps more importantly, how it has not. It argues, in effect, that, while Erdogan’s rule has been marked by dramatic shifts, actual transformations have been more limited and nuanced than either his supporters or detractors have been willing to admit.

Acknowledgments

Many people have made this symposium possible. The organizing committee would like to acknowledge the generous support of the Department of History, the College of Arts and Sciences, and the Office of the Provost. A special thanks to department administrator, Roslyn Jenkins, and graduate assistants, Alexandra Ruiz and Bill Pindell, for their assistance.

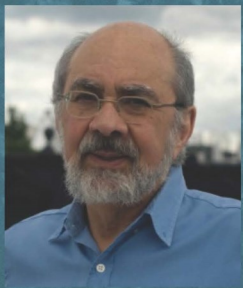
**Seton Hall University, Department of History,
Symposium Organizing Committee:**

Sean Harvey, chair
Nathaniel Knight
Maxim Matusevich
Golbarg Rekabtalaei
Thomas Rzeznik

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 Not for Export

Thursday, 6 February 2020, 5:30pm, Bethany Hall A

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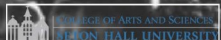


Ervand Abrahamian

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