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On Revolution: What is Revolution? What are the Differences that Distinguish Revolution from Other Forms of Political Violence?
Devrim Üzerine: Devrim Nedir? Devrimi Diğer Siyasal Şiddet Formlarından Ayıran Farklılıklar Nelerdir?

• **Hasan YENİÇİRAK***

*Dr., Siirt University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Department of Sociology, Siirt/Turkey
Dr., Siirt Üniversitesi, Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi, Sosyoloji Bölümü, Siirt/Türkiye
hasan.yenicirak@siirt.edu.tr
ORCID: 0000-0001-8769-6669



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Abstract

Revolution is one of the most ambiguous concepts in the history of thought. There are several reasons why a clear definition of the revolution cannot be made. First, scholars point to a different side of the revolution. Second, the revolution is used as an umbrella concept. Revolution is used as a form of political violence that includes rebellion, coup, and civil war. These two factors make it difficult to give a clear definition of the revolution. In this work, we will propose an alternative reading of revolution to overcome these problems, at least to some extent. This reading draws attention that the revolution has two fundamental usages: classical usage and modern usage. The classic use of the revolution also includes other forms of political violence, such as rebellion and insurrection. The classical use of the revolution we have seen since Ancient Egypt continued until the 18th century. With the 18th century, the concept of revolution reached its modern content and started to be used in the sense of creating a new society based on the radical rejection of the past. The modern content of the revolution may be more revealing in showing the difference between the revolution and other forms of political violence. We believe that such a reading of revolution can offer a more satisfactory answer to what revolution is, by sharply revealing the differences between revolution and other forms of political violence.

Keywords: Revolution, rebellion, coup, modern, classic

Öz

Devrim düşünce tarihinin en muğlak kavramlarından biridir. Devrimin net bir tanımının yapılamamasının birkaç sebebi vardır. İlki, her bir düşünürün devrimin farklı bir yanına dikkat çekmesidir. İkincisi, devrimin şemsiye bir kavram olarak kullanılmasıdır. Devrim, isyanı, darbeyi, iç savaşı da içine alan bir siyasal şiddet formu olarak kullanılmaktadır. Bu iki unsur devrimin net bir tanımının yapılamamasına neden olur. Biz de bu çalışmada, bir nebze de olsa bu problemlerin üstesinden gelmek için alternatif bir devrim okumasını ileri süreceğiz. Bu okumaya göre, devrimin en temelde iki temel kullanımı olduğuna dikkat çekiyoruz: Klasik kullanım ve modern kullanım. Devrimin klasik kullanımı aynı zamanda isyan, başkaldırı gibi diğer siyasal şiddet formlarını da içine almaktadır. Eski Mısır'dan itibaren gördüğümüz devrimin klasik kullanımı 18.yy'a kadar devam etmiştir. 18.yy ile birlikte devrim kavramı modern muhtevasına erişmiş ve geçmişin kökten reddine dayanan yeni bir toplum yaratma anlamında kullanılmaya başlamıştır. Devrimin modern muhtevası ise devrim ile diğer siyasal şiddet formları arasındaki farkı göstermede daha açıklayıcı olabilir. Böyle bir devrim okumasının, devrim ile diğer siyasal şiddet formları arasındaki farklılıkları kesin bir şekilde ortaya çıkararak, devrim nedir sorusuna daha tatmin edici bir cevap sunabileceği inancındayız.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Devrim, isyan, darbe, modern, klasik

1. Introduction

The revolution that contains both the greatest hopes and the worst suffering is one of the concepts that modern political thought has most discussed and has not yet reached consensus. While some thinkers such as Dostoyevsky, Maistre, Burke, who experienced what happened during the revolution and in post-revolution societies, saw the revolution as a source of suffering, the Enlightenment thinkers of revolution such as Condorcet, Vladimir Mayakovsky see the revolution as a prescription for salvation. Vladimir Mayakovsky (Mayakovsky, 1985: 77-78) put down on paper this fate of the revolution by positioning himself as follows:

“... O bestial!

O childish!

O penniworth!

O great!

What epithets haven't been piled on your doings?

... how will you turn out yet?

As a splendid edifice

or a heap of ruins?

To the engine-driver

in soot-clouds dense,

to the miner, boring through ore-bed layers

... from the philistine comes
 “O, be thrice accursed!”
 and from me,
 a poet,
 “Thrice blessed be, sublime!”

What exactly does revolution mean, which is the greatest source of suffering for some and a prescription for others' salvation? Which idea of revolution is a source of suffering for some and a prescription for salvation for others? In this work, we will try to make a study of the revolution based on these questions. This analysis is a search for a reasonable answer to the question of what is the revolution. This search also attempts to reveal the differences between the revolution and other forms of political violence, such as rebellion and coup.

2. The Usage of Term

When we look at the studies on revolution, there is no clear definition of what revolution is. There is little consensus among the definitions of revolution. Because scholars characterize revolution by attaching different sides to the term, which give it different meanings. For example, Aristotle defines revolution as a change in the constitution. In *Politics*, Aristotle wrote that there were

“two sorts of changes in government; the one affecting the constitution, where men seek to change from an existing form into something other, the other not affecting the constitution when, without disturbing the form of government, whether oligarchy or monarchy, or any they try to get the administration into their own hands” (Kimmel, 1990: 4).

Nevertheless, Samuel Huntington defines revolution as a radical transformation in society. “A revolution,” writes Huntington, “is a rapid, fundamental, and violent domestic change in dominant values and myths of a society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership, and government activity and policies” (Huntington, 1968: 264).

While John Dunn tells us that revolution requires violence, Charles Tilly tries to explain that revolution does not necessarily entail violence. According to Dunn, violence has become an integral part of the revolutionary situation (Cohan, 1975: 25). In *From Mobilization to Revolution*, Tilly wrote that

it does not predict clearly to the curve of violence before a revolution, since that depends on the pattern of mobilization and contention leading to the establishment of multiple sovereignty. Yet it does deny the necessity of a buildup of violence before a revolution (Tilly, 1978: 217).

While scholars such as Peter Calvert, Chalmers Johnson use revolution as an umbrella term, scholars such as Goldstone, Arendt see revolution as *sui generis*. In *Revolution*, Calvert wrote that “they would be well advised to retain the term ‘revolution’ itself as a political term covering all forms of violent change of the government or regime originating internally” (Calvert, 1970: 141). Nevertheless, Arendt says that “historically, wars are among the oldest phenomena of the recorded past while revolutions, properly speaking, did not exist prior to the modern age” (Arendt, 1990: 12).

The more interesting and also important, the term revolution is used different meanings in the same work. For example, Calvert gives exactly nine different uses of revolution. It follows respectively "defiance of authority, overthrow of rulers, social dissolution, revulsion against misused authority, constitutional change, reordering of society, inevitable stage of development, permanent attribute of ideal order, and psychological outlet" (Calvert, 1970: 132-136). Burns goes a little further and tells that revolution is used to express the author's anger rather than describe objective reality. He says that “the word ‘revolution’ may have many meanings, and for the purposes of controversy it can be usefully employed by the same persons in contradictory senses” (Burns, 1920: 111).

2.1. Revolution as an Umbrella Term

We have tried to show above that each thinker draws attention to a different aspect of the revolution concept. This situation makes it difficult to give a clear definition of the revolution. However, there is an even more important reason why the revolution is one of the most ambiguous concepts in the history of thought: the usage of revolution as an umbrella concept that encompasses other forms of political violence. The usage of revolution as an umbrella concept paves the way for it to be treated as rebellion, coup, rebellion, and civil war, depending on the revolution's results or the degree of violence and organization. Calvert is one of those who uses revolution as an umbrella concept. According to Calvert, the revolution also harbors rebellion, chaos, depending on its results. Calvert wrote that

“revolution may be understood throughout as referring to events in which physical force has actually been used successfully to overthrow a government or regime. Where such movements have not been successful, they are referred to, according to context, as ‘rebellions’, ‘revolts’, ‘insurrections’ or ‘uprisings’” (Calvert, 1970: 15).

Chalmers Johnson, one of the revolutionary theorists, defines six types of revolution, including peasant rebellions, army revolts, and coups. He suggests that revolutions are categorized into a six-fold typology conceived to exist at a very high level of abstraction. The six-fold typology is:

(1) the jacquerie, which is generally used to characterize a mass rebellion of peasants with strictly limited aims – the restoration of lost rights or the removal of specific grievances; (2) the millenarian rebellion, which is ‘the hope of a complete and radical change in the world which will be reflected in the millennium’; (3) the anarchistic rebellion, which occurs in response to conditions in the social system created when major changes have already been made in order to relieve dysfunctions perceived by the dominant part of population; (4) the Jacobin communist revolution, which is the ‘great’ revolution such as French Revolution. In this type of revolution, people employed violence to change the systems of landholding, taxation, choice of occupation, integrative myth, education, prestige symbols, military organization, and virtually every other substructure of the social system; (5) the conspiratorial coup d’état, which attempts at revolutionary change made by small, secret associations of individuals united by a common sense of grievance that may or may not correspond to the objective condition of social a system; (6) militarized mass insurrection. These revolutions are made by the mass of a population, but under the guidance of a conspiratorial, revolutionary general staff (Johnson, 1964: 31, 35, 40, 45-46, 49-50, 57).

The first three of these six types are rebellious. To put it in Johnson's own terms, these are unsuccessful attempts to bring down the existing government. However, although these three types did not involve the success of bringing down the old regime, Johnson considered them a type of revolution. As Cohan clearly states, Johnson defines the revolution as an uprising, a revolt, whether

successful or not (Cohan, 1975: 137). George Pettee, who treats revolution as an umbrella term, also labeled any violent or illicit political power transfer as a 'revolution'. Christoph Kotowski (Kotowski, 1984: 408) shows how Pettee terms the following kinds of violent political change as 'revolutions':

- (1) Private palace revolutions, which are the quiet replacement of top officials by some illicit means;
- (2) public palace revolutions, which replace top officials after some kind of minor public battle for power;
- (3) secession, which is 'the rebellion of one area against the rule of another country';
- (4) great national revolutions, which are mass phenomena and change both political and social structures;
- and (5) systematic revolutions, in which not just one state but an entire civilization is transformed.

However, all this does not mean that these theorists do not distinguish between revolution and other forms of political violence. Revolutionary theorists express functional equivalents of revolution, but they also draw attention to the differences between revolution and functional equivalents of revolution. For example, according to Pettee, "as a kind of social change, revolution is "the most wasteful, the most expensive, the last to be chosen; but also the most powerful, and therefore always appealed to in what men feel to be the last resort" (Pettee, 1938: 96).

In this context, Gurr offers a more descriptive and systematic explanation. Gurr draws attention to important points by using the phrase "revolutions and lesser forms of violence," such as riot, turmoil, conspiracy, internal war. According to Gurr, the properties and processes that distinguish a revolution from other forms of political violence are substantively and theoretically interesting, but at a general level of analysis, they seem to be differences of degree, not kind (Gurr, 1970: 5). In Gurr's typology, the distinction between revolution and lesser forms of violence is the degree of organization, the focus of violence, and scale. General definitions of the three forms of political violence examined are as follows:

Turmoil: Relatively spontaneous, unorganized political violence with substantial popular participation, including violent political strikes, riots, political clashes, and localized rebellions.

Conspiracy: Highly organized political violence with limited participation, including organized political assassinations,

small-scale terrorism, small-scale guerilla wars, coups d'état, and mutinies.

Internal War: Highly organized political violence with widespread popular participation, designed to overthrow the regime or dissolve the state and accompanied by extensive violence, including large-scale terrorism and guerrilla wars, civil wars, and revolutions (Gurr, 1970: 11).

As I have tried to show, some revolutionary theorists take revolution as an umbrella term. Thus, "revolution" becomes a broad term referring to a wide array of violent confrontations. This situation makes it difficult to give a clear definition of the revolution. Therefore, we will propose an alternative reading of revolution to overcome these problems, at least to some extent. This reading proposes that the revolution has two fundamental usages: classical usage and modern usage. We believe that such a reading of revolution can offer a more satisfactory answer to what revolution is, by sharply revealing the differences between revolution and other forms of political violence.

3. Two Usage of the Revolution

We have seen that the concept of revolution has many usages. However, when we carry out a historical and philosophical study of the revolution, we see that it has two most fundamental usage. Revolution has classical usage meaning 'cycle', 'return' and modern usage meaning 'radical rupture from the past'. Svetlana Boym has called this the paradox of the revolution. Boym writes that "the word revolution ... contains a paradox of inscribing both repetition ('turning or rotating motion around the axis, a single complete cycle of such orbital or axial motion) and rupture ('a sudden or momentous change in any situation' or 'a sudden political overthrow or seizure of power brought about from within the political system'" (Boym, 1991: 182).

3.1. The Classical Usage of the Revolution

The classical usage of the revolution emphasizes "change is far from starting with a new beginning, was seen as falling back into a different stage of its cycle" (Arendt, 1990: 21). The etymological study of the concept of revolution can help us better understand the classical usage of revolution. The root of the concept of revolution is "volvere" in Indo-European languages. "Volvere" means return. The concept of "revolvere" derives from the word "volvere" by adding the

prefix "re" meaning "back, repeat". The concept of revolution also derives from "revolvere". Revolution was first used to mean "return", "cycle".

The classical usage of the revolution also includes rebellion, rebellion, and civil war. As Therborn states, "revolution might include the meaning of disturbance or riot, its main meaning was recurrent motion" (Göran, 2008: xiv). In other words, the classical usage of revolution is the usage of revolution as an umbrella term—Calvert, who made a historical study of the concept of revolution, detailed this subject with examples. As a result of his research, he came to the following conclusion: "We are therefore left with the conclusion that revolution to the ancient Egyptians was regarded officially and generally as being rebellion..." (Calvert, 1970: 25).

Continuing his study of revolution with the Greek period, Calvert states that the revolution represents social displacement in the Greeks. This social displacement also includes revolt in addition to revolution. Calvert wrote that "to the world of classical Greece, revolution was a concept that embodied both the change of rulers implied in the palace revolt, and the social displacement implied by the rise of an aristocracy or the fall of aristocratic exclusiveness" (Calvert, 1970: 29). Calvert takes revolution here as an umbrella concept representing social change.

Although Greeks had their fill of revolution, they had no singular word for it. As Arthur Hatto states, although the Greeks knew the concept 'revolution' and were able to express it in a word, they did not always choose the same word and sometimes chose two or more (Hatto, 1949: 500). For example, While Herodotus speaks of "uprising" to revolutionize the state, Thucydides speaks of "change of constitution". Or, in *Republic*, Plato also uses both "netorizen" in the sense of entertaining revolutionary designs and "metabole" in the sense of change (Hatto, 1949: 498).

Such usage of the revolution continues with Aristotle, who is the real founder of the study of revolution (Cohan, 1975: 46). For Aristotle, revolution is a political phenomenon, both violent and non-violent, representing the fundamental process of change, which leads to the alteration or displacement of social groupings (Calvert, 1970: 34). In other words, In Aristotle, what is meant by revolution is both the change of the constitution and the government's seizure.

We see the classic usage of the revolution in Polybius. Hatto shows that Polybius meet revolution in another sense -that of a slowly turning wheel (Hatto, 1949: 498). Polybius treats revolution as a "cycle" and thinks of it as an umbrella concept explaining social

change. Polybius makes kingship pass into tyranny, tyranny into aristocracy, aristocracy into oligarchy, oligarchy into democracy, democracy into mob-rule, and mob-rule into kingship. Thus, the political revolution returns to the point they started (Polybius, 1923: 279-289).

3. 2. The Modern Usage of the Revolution

This classical usage of revolution, which includes also the meaning of rebellion, turmoil, continued until the last quarter of the 18th century. However, with the French Revolution, the revolution reached its modern content. French Revolution created the modern concept of revolution (Göran, 2008: xiv). Contrary to its classical usage, the essence of the modern usage of revolution is the idea of radical change in society, which contains a new beginning. With its modern content, the revolution has been used as a new beginning based on a radical rejection of the past. While Jeff Goodwin says that “while social conflict may be as old as humanity itself, the reality and ideal of radically transforming a ‘society’, ‘nation’, or ‘people’ -the economic, political and cultural arrangements of a large population- are coeval with modernity” (Goodwin, 1997: 12); or while Jack. A. Goldstone says that “revolutions are rare... most societies have never experienced revolutions, and most ages until modern times did not know revolutions” (Goldstone, 1994: 38), they mentioned modern usage of revolution.

The unique aspect of the modern usage of the revolution is that it creates a new society. As Perroux put it, the revolution is based on a project for another world sensed and understood before it is built. The French Revolution, the first experimental application of the revolution's modern usage, is based on such a project. The French revolutionaries wanted to create a new society, as Therbon stated (Göran, 2008: xiv).

The ultimate goal of the modern usage of the revolution is to create a new, perfect society. Sorokin perfectly defines the idea of modern revolution, which based on the idea of a radical change of the existing order in order to create a new society: “Revolution is a change in the behavior, beliefs, and ideology of the people; ... in the biologic composition of population; ... in the social structure of society” (Sorokin, 1925: 11).

Thus, we can answer the question we asked at the entrance. The idea of revolution, which is the greatest source of suffering for some and a prescription for salvation for some, constitutes the modern usage of the revolution. While Mayakovsky says that “and from me, a

poet, thrice blessed be, sublime!” (Mayakovsky, 1985: 77-78), he blessed this modern usage of the revolution. While Joseph de Maistre says that “there is a satanic quality to the French Revolution that distinguishes it from everything we have ever seen or anything we are ever likely to see in the future” (Maistre, 2003: 41), he condemned this modern use of the revolution.

This modern usage of the revolution distinguishes it from other forms of political violence such as riot and coup. For better understanding, we can refer to Goldstone. Goldstone, who takes revolution with its modern usage, presents the difference between revolution and other forms of political violence in an explanatory way. Goldstone highlights three factors in his statement: state breakdown, competition among claimants for a central authority, and building new institutions. According to Goldstone (1991: 437-439),

These aspects can also occur separately or in partial combinations: state breakdown without competition for central authority occurs in secession movements, peasant uprisings, and urban riots; state breakdown and competition without attempts at building new institutions occur in dynastic civil wars; competition and institution-building occur without state breakdown in coups and elite reform movements. What distinguishes revolution from other forms of political violence is precisely the interwoven combination of all three aspects.

Goldstone gives the modern usage of the revolution by distinguishing the revolution from other forms of political violence. According to Goldstone,

instead of presenting themselves as removing a temporary aberration and restoring a traditional order, revolution sought to discredit the entire ancient régime and to erect political and social institutions that would begin a new age ... thus, the revolution has come to establish an entirely new organization of society (Goldstone, 1991: 439-440).

A coup is a change in leadership, a power struggle, but it can never create a new society based on a radical rejection of the past like revolution. Likewise, rebellion and revolution are both forms of violence. Both negate the current conditions. Nevertheless, they are very different from each other in terms of what they negate. While the revolution fundamentally negates the existing order to create a new society, the rebellion struggles to correct the shortcomings in the existing order. In both revolution and rebellion, people say "no" to the

conditions they find. The revolutionary says "no" to everything. It completely negates existence. However, rebellion does not entirely negate existence. It negates another side of the same existence to benefit one glorified side of existence (Camus, 1991: 246-252).

Rebellion kills people, not principles, but revolution kills both principles and people (Camus, 1991: 106, 246). It was not the king himself that was attacked in the French Revolution, but the kingdom itself as an institution, the divine principle of right embodied in the kingdom. It was not just XVI. Louis who died on the guillotine; it was the divine order, principles which XVI. Louis represented. A detail that Richard Lachmann drew attention to in his 1789 French Revolution study reveals this difference between revolution and rebellion more concretely. Before the revolution, Turgot and Necker put forward the idea of tax collection to solve France's economic crisis. Turgot and Necker's efforts to collect taxes caused unmitigated anger in the aristocracy and the priests before the revolution. Lachmann called this period as a revolt of the aristocracy of 1787-89 (Lachman, 1997: 88). The revolt of the aristocracy of 1787-89 did not aim to destroy the existing world order, its values, and its principles. They just wanted to regain the strong position they had before. However, the 1789 French Revolution wanted to destroy the existing world order, values, principles, and replace it with the new world order.

4. Conclusion

When we restrict the revolution concept as classical and modern usage, the differences between the revolution and other forms of political violence such as rebellion and coup become more apparent. All forms of political violence aim fundamentally at social displacement. In this sense, all forms of political violence are similar. Nevertheless, with its modern usage, revolution is something very different from coups and revolts. Coups attack political leaders for social displacement. Revolts attack leaders or institutions with a broader organization. However, with its modern usage, the revolution attacks the existing social order itself, its values, habits, and traditions. When we consider the revolution in this way, we can distinguish it from other forms of political violence and give a more inclusive and satisfactory answer to what revolution is.

When we think in terms of Turkey, this work is having more importance because Turkey's history has been shaped both by coups and revolution. Here we do not make a description of a revolution or coup in Turkey. Such an effort is in scope and intensity to be a subject

of study in itself. Here, in Turkey, we try to express that many people consciously or unconsciously misuse the revolution concept. The concept of revolution is used in different ways, without any theoretical foundations. It will be sufficient to draw attention to just one example to understand the subject better—for example, the military coup of 1960. The military coup of 1960 is considered a revolution by some segments. The concept of "revolution" is used even in the court minutes. However, what happened in the 1960s is the change of the political leader. 1960 is not a revolution; it is just a coup. In 1960, we cannot speak of a revolution, in a sense used by Sorokin.

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