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REVOLUTION AS AN UNDER-EXPLORED THEME IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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ABSTRACT

The Arab Spring of 2011 has revived an academic interest in social movements and revolutions in the Middle East, which was used to be associated with the persistence of authoritarianism. Although the Arab Spring has come up with different outcomes in various countries, currently, there is a burgeoning literature that studies reasons, processes and outcomes of recent social movements and revolutions particularly in the Middle East. In fact, the subject of social movements and revolutions has been underestimated and underexplored in the Middle East studies, or Social Movements studies for a long time. This article argues that despite the negligence of the relevant literature, history of the Middle East has witnessed numerous social movements and revolutions. Then, it provides a historical overview of Middle Eastern revolutions. Against this background, this paper attempts to analyze potential reasons of the aloofness the literature towards social movements and revolutions the Middle East.

Keywords: Social Movements, Revolution, Essentialism, Middle East Studies, Arab Spring.

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Ortadoğu'da Az Çalışılmış Bir Konu Olarak Devrim

ÖZ

2011 Arap Baharı, otoriteryenizmin sürekliliği ile özdeşleştirilen Ortadoğu'da toplumsal hareketler ve devrimlere olan akademik ilginin artmasına sebep oldu. Bu süreç farklı ülkelerde değişik sonuçlara yol açmış olsa da özellikle Ortadoğu'da devrimlerin ve toplumsal hareketlerin nedenleri, seyri ve sonuçları üzerinde çalışan yeni bir literatür ortaya çıktı. Aslında bölgede meydana gelen toplumsal hareketler ve devrimler gerek Ortadoğu çalışmaları literatüründe, gerekse toplumsal hareket çalışmaları literatüründe uzunca bir süre ihmal edilmiş ve az çalışılmıştır. Bu makalede, ilgili literatürde göz ardı edilmiş olmasına rağmen Ortadoğu'da çok sayıda toplumsal hareketin ve devrimin olduğu belirtilmektedir ve Ortadoğu'da meydana gelen devrimlerin genel bir değerlendirmesi yapılmaktadır. Bu arka planın ortaya çıkarılmasından sonra ilgili literatürün Ortadoğu'da meydan gelen devrimlere ve sosyal hareketlere karşı kayıtsızlığının nedenleri ortaya konulmaya çalışılmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Toplumsal Hareketler, Devrim, Ortadoğu Çalışmaları, Arap Baharı.

Introduction

For long years the Middle East region has been recalled with persistent authoritarianism, prevalence of tradition over social and political structures, fundamentalism, underdevelopment etc.. Social movements and revolutions have been underexplored and ignored in the relevant literature covering the Middle East studies or the social movements. However, the Arab Spring of 2011 has revived an interest in, and driven attention towards social movements in the Middle East. Then, a new wave of studies has emerged to cover reasons and outcomes of social movements and revolutions, revolutionary change with particular emphasis on the Middle East.[1]

Revolution marks profound changes and rapid transformation of social, economic, and political structures in any country. Hence, it unleashes a volatile period and rarely come up with the desired ends. However, some people are sympathetic to the revolutionary changes because they claim to provide alternatives to the dominant political and ideological standings, and they may lead to the capture of power by previously marginalized social and political groups. On the other hand, the ruling social groups and elites are tended to view revolutionary challenges as social anomalies or political threats. Hence, controversial nature of revolution and social movements made the study of them a challenging but an exciting attempt.

This article aims to make a review of the Middle Eastern revolutions. It contends that despite the negligence of the relevant literature, modern history of the Middle East has witnessed numerous social movements and revolutions.[2] Then, the article attempts to explain the relatively silence of vast literature over the Middle East studies to cover revolutions and social movements in the region. It argues that there are three reasons of the negligence of the literature. Above else, despite the high frequency of revolutionary situations in the region, they did not usually end with revolutionary transformations.[3] However, as will be outlined below, relying on a comprehensive definition of revolution it could be count at least five waves of revolutions in the region. Secondly, for many researchers most uprisings and revolts in the Middle East, and political changes that have been claimed to be revolutions do not accurately fit to the definition of the revolution. Actually, to call any political and social transformation process as the revolution is mostly controversial either because of debates on definition of revolution, or because of unique characteristics of each revolutionary process. Thirdly, considering the revolution as a 'modern' and Western-centric phenomenon, the essentialist approaches that focus on cultural and traditional factors to understand the Middle Eastern politics and society deny non-Western peoples' agency to make revolution. Eventually, they come to the point that political processes in the region that called as revolution, do not accurately correspond the revolution. In order to elaborate this discussion in a detailed and comprehensive way, firstly debates over the definition of the concept of revolution will be

[1] See, Fawaz A. Gerges (Ed.), *The New Middle East: Protest and Revolution in the Arab World*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2014; Said Amir Arjomand (Ed.) *The Arab Revolution of 2011: A Comparative Perspective*, Albany, SUNY Press, 2015; Ronen A. Cohen, *Upheavals in the Middle East: The Theory and Practice of A Revolution*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2014; Derya Göçer Akder, "Theories of Revolutions and Arab Uprisings: The Lessons from the Middle East", *Ortadoğu Etütleri*, vol 4, no 2, 2013.

[2] See, Joel Beinin and Frederic Vairel (eds.), *Social Movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East*, Sandford, Sandford University Press, 2011; Camila Pastor de Maria y Campos, "Revolt and Revolution in the Middle East: 1830-2012", *Regions and Cohesion*, vol.8, no.3, 2018; Y. Doğan Çetinkaya (Ed.), *Ortadoğu: Direniş, Devrim, Emperyalizm*, İstanbul, İletişim Yay., 2014.

[3] Göçer Akder, "Theories of Revolutions and Arab Uprisings: The Lessons from the Middle East", p.92.

addressed. And then, Middle Eastern revolutions will be reviewed. Finally, it will conclude with a debate on essentialism and revolution in the Middle East.

The Controversy over the Definition of Revolution

It is natural that various forms of power and force wielded over different social groups led some kinds of resistance. Forms of resistance vary from passive resistance to migration, rebellion, uprising etc. depending on the form of authority. As an extension of the rise of mass politics in modern history, forms of resistance have also turned into collective actions, that is social movements, against the power. As Charles Tilly suggested, social movements have a wide repertoire of action to voice their opposition.[4] Revolution is a process that come up with the overthrown of ruling regimes by popular mass movements.

Revolutions rarely take place in world history. They usually happen in authoritarian political structures with dynamic social and economic conditions, and end with profound transformation of political, social and economic structures. In addition to social and economic contexts, international conditions also closely effect the evolution of revolutionary transformation. Despite some similarities, revolutions have taken place under certain historical, economic and social context that made each revolution unique. For this reason, definitions of revolutions, its content, evolution, and outcomes are changing depending on their specific contexts.[5]

The concept of revolution, however, earned its modern meaning just after the French revolution of 1789 and become part of the European political literature. The French revolution has been regarded as a typical example of revolution has shaped the literature along with some other great Western revolutions.[6] The Euro-centric approaches to the revolution in the literature underestimated not only the Middle Eastern revolutions, but almost all Third World Revolutions. However, recurring anti-colonial revolutions in the non-Western World led to the rise of modernist and structural perspectives in order to understand this phenomenon. In this respect there has been several definitions and taxonomies of revolution considering the ideology and post-revolutionary socio-political structures, i.e. bourgeoisie, constitutionalist, socialist, nationalist.

For Huntington revolution means "a rapid, fundamental, and violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths of a society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership, and government activity and policies."[7] Skocpol makes a difference between social and political revolutions considering their implications over political, economic and social structures. According to her, "social revolutions are rapid, basic transformation of a society's state and class structures; and they are accompanied and in part carried through by class-based

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[4] Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization ro Revolution*, New York, Random House, 1978, p.151-58. For a review of forms of power and resistance in the Middle East see, Charles Tripp, *The Power and the People: Paths of Resistance in the Middle East*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2013.

[5] Jeff Goodwin, Theda Skocpol, "Explaining Revolutions in the Contemporary Third World", *Politics & Society*, vol. 17, no. 4, 1989.

[6] A.T. Hatto, "The Semantics of 'Revolution'", P.J. Vatikiotis (Ed.), *Revolution in the Middle East and Other Case Studies*, New Jersey, Rowman and Little Field, 1972, p.25-29.

[7] Samuel P.Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies,* New Haven, Yale University Press, 2004, p.264.

revolts from below." However, political revolutions do not transform social structures but state structures, and "they are not necessarily accomplished through class conflict."[8] Here, the role of elites and social classes are central to definition or taxonomy of revolutions. In this regard Trimberger puts forward a concept called revolution from above. Accordingly, revolutions are not necessarily accompanied or carried out by class-based revolts from below. What is distinctive for a revolution is the destruction of 'economic and political power of the dominant social group of the old regime' through extra-legal takeover of the central state apparatus. [9] However, these definitions do not provide measurement for the extent of social and political transformation and its pace.[10] Considering the pace and process of revolutionary process Kamrava proposes a different taxonomy of revolutions; sudden and quick, phased and planned, and negotiated.[11] In a nutshell, considering the role of elite, revolutionary process, its implications and outcomes there are many debates over the content and definition of revolution.

A new wave of revolutions that took place in the 1980s and 1990s were considerably different from 'classical' revolutions, which led to the rise of new studies to explain revolutions. Recently, there has been a tendency to combine social movements and revolutions based on political contention. In this regard Goldstone proposes a new definition of revolution: "an effort to transform the political institutions and the justifications for political authority in a society, accompanied by formal or informal mass mobilization and noninstitutionalized actions that undermine existing authorities."[12] According to this definition, any attempt for transformation of political structure and mains sources of legitimacy of power is the must ingredient of a revolutionary movement. Naturally, mass mobilization – either formal or informal, violent or non-violent – is an indispensable part of revolution. The third characteristic of a revolutionary movement is non-institutionalized, i.e. not necessarily illegal and violent, but unconventional, forms of action that undermine ruling regimes. This definition includes both violent and peaceful movements that aimed to overthrow the ruling regimes, but excludes uprisings and coups that do not have a vision to change sources of legitimacy of power, and existing institutions. It provides a useful ground to analyze Middle Eastern revolutions.

Revolutionary Waves in the Middle East

The controversy over the definition of revolution has led to rise of concerns about the nature and characteristics of revolutionary events in the Middle East, which raised questions whether they are truly revolutions. However, Goldstone's definition is applicable to a series of Middle Eastern events to call them revolutions. Additionally, it should be pointed out that revolutionary movements are tended to spill over around the neighboring countries because of multiple interactions among the neighboring peoples. A successful revolutionary change in any

[8] Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1979, p.4.
[9] Ellen K. Trimberger, *Revolution from Above: Military Bureacrats and Development in Japan, Turkey, Egypt and Peru*, New Brunswick, Transaction Books, 1978, p.1-11.
[10] John Foran, *Taking Power: On the Origins of Third World Revolutions*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p.6-7.
[11] Mehran Kamrava, "Revolution Revisited: the Structuralist-Voluntarist Debate", *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 32, no 2, 1999, p.320.
[12] Jack A. Goldstone, "Toward a Fourth Generation of Revolutionary Theory", *Annual Review of Political Science*, vol.4, no.1, 2001, p.139-187.

country could be regarded as a model for dissident peoples in the neighborhood that share similar cultural, economic and political traits, which trigger a wave of revolutionary movements in a particular region. Considering the modern history of Middle East, we can recall five waves of revolutions in the region.

The first wave of revolution in the modern history of the Middle East was consisted of constitutional movements in the Qajar Iran (1906) and the Ottoman Turkey (1908). The constitutional revolutions aimed at transforming traditional monarchies into constitutional ones.[13] While the Ottoman and Qajar monarchies were struggling under heavy financial crises and foreign pressure, constitutional monarchy emerged as an alternative government model that was attractive to the Turkish and Iranian intelligentsia. Those movements that led by new intellectuals in both countries were supported by wider segments of society, and ended with the transformation of political regimes. However, the constitutional revolutions marked not only changes in government structures, but also profoundly changed the sources of legitimacy of political power and the prevalent norms in politics.

The second wave of revolution in the region was marked by anti-colonial, nationalist revolutions. In this regard, we can call the Turkish revolution led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Egyptian revolution of 1919, the Algerian resistance of 1954-61, and the South Yemen Revolution of 1967. These movements were essentially anti-colonialist movements led by nationalist leaders with the strong backing of society. The Turkish revolution began as a resistance movement against the allied occupation after the WW I, and continued with wide-scale reforms that aimed at profound transformation of economy, politics and society in Turkey.[14] In the Egyptian case, nationalist elite led by Said Zaghlul and the Vafd Party who attempted to show up in the Paris Conference (1919) to voice Egyptian demand for independence, were barred from attendance by the British colonial administration. This event unleashed a massive resistance and occasional fighting between the Egyptian people and the colonial administration. Eventually, the Egyptian delegation attended the Paris Conference. Later on, Egypt was granted with independence in February 1922, but its sovereignty was severely curbed by the British government.[15] Likewise, there was a growing reaction against the French rule in Algeria. Nationalist, Islamist and socialist movements were united after the WW II to resist against the French colonialism. The anti-colonial movement was also promoted and supported by the nationalist leader of Egypt, Gamal Abdolnaser. Seven years fighting against the French colonialism ended with the independence of Algeria in March 1962.[16] Another example of anti-colonial revolution in the Middle East was realized in the South Yemen. The British colonial administration ended in South Arabia after four years of struggle for independence, which was followed by the proclamation of People's Republic of South Yemen. The National Liberation Front, a Marxist movement that was part of the independence struggle took over the

[13] Nader Sohrabi, *Revolution and Constitutionalism in the Ottoman Empire and Iran*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2011; Aykut Kansu, *The Revolution of 1908 in Turkey*, Leiden, Brill, 1997; *Vanessa Martin, Iran Between Islamic Nationalism and Secularism: The Constitutional Revolution of 1906*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2013.

[14] Ellen K. Trimberger, "A Theory of Elite Revolutions," *Comparative International Development*, vol.7, no.3 1972; Hakan Yilmaz, "The Kemalist Revolution and the Foundation of the One Party Regime", in *Prof. Dr. Ergun Özbudun'a Armağan –Cilt I, Siyaset Bilimi (Essays in Honor of Ergun Özbudun, Vol. I Political Science)*, ed. Serap Yazıcı, Kemal Gözler, Fuat Keyman, Ankara, Yetkin Yayınevi, 2008, p.535-564.

[15] Juan Cole, "Egypt's Modern Revolutions and the Fall of Mubarak", Gerges (ed.), *The New Middle East: Protest and Revolution in the Arab World*, p.67-69.

[16] Foran, *Taking Power: On the Origins of Third World Revolutions*, p.91-104.

government and changed the country's name to People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. That state became the first socialist state in the Arab World.[17]

The Arab nationalism marked the third wave of Middle Eastern revolutions that took place in a period between 1952-1969. They were common in overthrowing traditional monarchies through military coup d'états by some nationalist officers. Although the power change took place through military coups, this process in the Arab World regarded as 'revolutions' not only because the coup makers called them revolutions, but because of underlying reasons that lay behind them. Moreover, they undermined traditional social structures, successfully mobilized wide segments of society for their cause, and led considerable political, economic and social changes.[18] The Revolutionary Command Council in Egypt, for instance, that took over power in July 1952 changed the government model to republic. The extensive land reform stroked a heavy below to notables and previous elite; extended education; and created a new middle class both in urban centers and rural areas. One of the successes of the Egyptian revolution of 1952 led by Gamal Abdolnaser was the nationalization of the Suez Canal and the eradication of the British influence in the country.[19] The 'successful exemplary' of the Egyptian revolution and the Nasserism inspired and promoted similar 'revolutions' in Iraq (1958), the North Yemen (1962), and Libya (1969).

The Iranian revolution of 1979 led to the rise of a debate on the Islamic revolution and it inspired revolutionary Islamist movements in many countries. The growing resentment to the American influence and authoritarian rule of the Pahlavi monarchy in Iran evolved into an opposition coalition including various segments of society. The Pahlavi rule collapsed after massive opposition demonstrations and strikes. It is called Islamic Revolution because of the leading role of ulama in the revolution, and the utilization of Islamic norms and narratives as part of the revolutionary ideology in order to mobilize people against the Pahlavi regime. Moreover, revolutionary government attempted to Islamize politics, economy and society. The Iranian revolution that is widely regarded as the Middle Eastern equivalent of the great social revolutions of France, Russia, and China experienced almost all stages of the 'classic' revolutions. The radicals seized all instruments of power after a transition process marked by the rule of moderate nationalist and liberal figures. In addition to geopolitical changes triggered by the revolution, the Iranian attempts to export their revolution caused eight-year war between Iran and Iraq. After the end of the war, Iranian government engaged in reconstruction of country, ceased some extremities of the radicals, and compromised with some pre-revolutionary social and political values and elite.[20] Notwithstanding the relative compromise with previous values and institutions, currently it seems that the revolutionary institutions and values are stabilized and settled down in the country. Although it inspired many Islamic revolutionary movements

[17] Fred Halliday, *Revolution and Foreign Policy: The Case of South Yemen 1967-1987*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990.

[18] Hanna Batatu, "The Egyptian, Syrian and Iraqi Revolutions: Some Observations on Their Underlying Causes and Social Character", Inaugural Lecture, Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 25 January 1983.

[19] Cole, "Egypt's Modern Revolutions and the Fall of Mubarak", p.69-73.

[20] Mohsen E. Milani, *The Making of Islamic Revolution: From Monarchy to Islamic Republic*, 2n ed., Boulder, Westview Press, 1994; Fred Halliday, The Iranian Revolution: Uneven Development and Religious Populism", Journal of International Affairs, vol.36, no.2, 1982/83, p.187-207.

across the Middle East, it failed to produce similar outcomes. However, the Sudanese "revolution" of 1989 could be attributed to the same rank with the Iranian revolution.[21]

The Arab Spring of 2011 could be regarded as the fifth wave of revolution in the Middle East. The self-immolation of Mohammad Bouazizi in Tunisia in December 2010 in order to protest government pressure and worsening economic conditions triggered massive demonstrations that ended with the overthrow of President Zine al-Abidine Bin Ali who ruled the country for over twenty years. Later on, massive anti-government protests rapidly spread over other Arab countries. Egyptian President Husni Mubarak that ruled the country since 1981, who became a symbol of persistent authoritarian rule in the Arab world, was forced to resign by wide opposition protests in February 2011. Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi, who was in power since 1969, used extreme violence against civilian protestors and opposition in order to save himself from the fate of Mubarak and Bin Ali, which led to the military intervention of some NATO countries. The anti-regime protest demonstrations that targeted al-Khalifah dynasty in Bahrain was suppressed by the military assistance of the Kingdom Saudi Arabia. Ali Abdollah Saleh of Yemen handed over power to his deputy Mansour Hadi through the mediation the GCC after long-time protests against the Saleh government and the rising violence in the country. The violent and extreme measures of the Assad regime in Syria against the opposition demonstrations dragged the country into a bloody civil war. Implications of the Arab Spring not only gripped the aforementioned countries, but more or less affected almost all Arab countries.

The Arab Spring has ended the myths of the persistence of authoritarian rules in the Arab world, and the desperateness of Arab people against the surrounding political, social and economic challenges.[22] It has proved that the Arab people could rise up for their rights and freedoms, and precipitate political, economic, and social changes. What is surprising in the Arab Spring was not the uprising of people, but the extent and the pace of the opposition demonstrations.[23]

Considering the outcomes of Arab Spring, it is still controversial in the literature to call it as revolution.[24] The revolutionary process ended with a successful and lasting power transition only in Tunisia. Yemen and Libya are still suffering civil wars and foreign intervention. The civil war that bring the country to the edge of disintegration is still going on in Syria. The revolution in Egypt, one of the symbolic cases of the Arab Spring, was reverted with a military coup in July 2013 that come up with building a new authoritarian rule. However, some people liken the Arab Spring to 1848 Revolutions because of its diverse and various implications. [25]

To sum up, it is not new for the Middle East that the people rally around an ideology, or political, economic, and social causes; mobilize, challenge and revolt against ruling authoritarian regimes; overthrow existing inefficient regimes through mass mobilization; and build new

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[21] J. Millard Burr and Robert O. Collins, *Revolutionary Sudan: Hasan al-Turabi and the Islamist State, 1989-2000*, Leiden, Brill, 2003.

[22] Fawaz A. Gerges, "Introduction", Gerges (ed.), *The New Middle East: Protest and Revolution in the Arab World*, p.20.

[23] Marc Lynch, "Introduction", in Marc Lynch (ed.), *The Arab Uprisings Explained: New Contentious Politics in the Middle East*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2014, p.7-8.

[24] Lynch, "Introduction", *The Arab Uprisings Explained*, p.14-15; Jack A. Goldstone, "Bringing Regimes Back In: Explaining Success and Failure in the Middle East Revolts of 2011", in S. Amir Arjomand (ed.) *The Arab Revolution of 2011,* p. 53.

[25] S. Amir Arjomand, "The Arab Revolution of 2011 and Its Counterrevolutions in Comparative Perspective", Arjomand (ed.) *The Arab Revolution of 2011*, p.9-52.

political norms, values and institutions. The history of revolutionary waves in the region boosts that idea, as well.

Essentialism, Islam and Revolution

Against this background, why these topics, social movements and revolutions in the Middle East is under-studied? It is argued that there are mainly two reasons for the relative underestimation of social movements and revolutions in the Middle East by the relevant literature. First, as it is elaborated above, ongoing debates over the definition of revolution and social movements make the revolutionary characteristics of the Middle Eastern developments contested. However, based on a comprehensive definition of revolution as put forward by Goldstone,[26] we have counted five waves of revolution across the region. Then, there must be another reason for the relative negligence of the literature over Middle Eastern revolutions.

In this regard, the essentialist approaches that rely on Arab-Islamic culture of the region as the main explanatory factor comes to the fore. Actually, the essentialist approaches foster a myth that Arabic and Islamic culture and traditions prevailed over the Middle East have prevented fundamental and revolutionary social changes and facilitated persistence of authoritarian rules.[27] Moreover, the essentialist approaches underestimate the agency of Middle Eastern peoples to make revolution, and argues that Islamic tradition is alien to the revolution. According to this perspective, the principle of equality of all people and the idea of freedom that played critical role in the transformation of modern Europe is alien to the essence of Islam.[28] Likewise, Bernard Lewis argued that Islamic thought do not allow the resistance against the corrupt government in the Western sense. Although there are some uprisings and revolts against government in the Islamic history that are justified to restore justice and purify religion from decadence, the revolution in the name of equality and freedom is a foreign phenomenon and alien to Islam.[29]

This essentialist view of the relationship between revolution and Islam is very controversial and open to question. Especially the Iranian revolution of 1979 has challenged these essentialist assumptions. Like many social scientists, Bernard Lewis regarded the 'Islamic revolution' as an 'authentic' one 'in the classical sense.' However, he argued, it could be understood, and should be studied "against the background of Islamic action and ideas, memories and symbols" rather than comparing it to other classical Western revolutions. He argued, "Islamic history provides its own models of revolution," which are considerably different

[26] In his definition of revolution Goldstone contended that an attempt "to transform the political institutions and bases of legitimacy of political authority in a society, accompanied by formal or informal mass mobilization and noninstitutionalized actions that undermine existing authorities." Goldstone, "Toward a Fourth Generation of Revolutionary Theory."

[27] See, Fawaz A. Gerges, "Introduction", Gerges (ed.), The New Middle East: Protest and Revolution in the Arab World, p.21-22; Y. Doğan Çetinkaya (ed.), *Toplumsal Hareketler: Tarih, Teori, Deneyim*, İstanbul, İletişim, 2014, p.11-12.

[28] P.J. Vatikiotis, "Introduction", P.J. Vatikiotis (ed.), *Revolution in the Middle East and Other Case Studies*, New Jersey, Rowman and Little Field, 1972, p.9.

[29] Bernard Lewis, "Islamic Concepts of Revolution", Vatikiotis (ed.), Revolution in the Middle East and Other Case Studies, pp.30-38.

from Western sense of revolution. [30] Accordingly, Islamic history, law and tradition have revolved around two contrasting political traditions. In one hand, there has been an activist tradition that promotes resistance against unjust rulers; on the other hand, there has been a quietist tradition that has promoted any sort of authority over the believers. Both traditions have been based on Islamic history, the Quran and the Sunnah. According to this view, Prophet Mohammad was a rebel before becoming a head of state. As a rebel, he provided a paradigm for resistance, which was reiterated by later religious revolts in the Islamic history. However, the quietist tradition that "rests on the Prophet as sovereign, as judge, and as statesman" overwhelmed the activist one. Hence, uprisings, revolts, resistance have been regarded as instants of disobedience and fitnah that may lead society towards chaos. The fear of chaos and fitnah have made the Islamic society submissive towards the authority.[31]

In order to deal with the challenge posed by the Iranian revolution, some essentialist authors focused on the distinctive characteristics of the Shiite faith as a so-called revolutionary ideology, based on selective reading of the history of Shiism. At some point the narrative on the revolutionary Shiism became so prevalent that even well-known structuralist scholar Skocpol acknowledged the importance of Shiite faith in terms of organization and culture in the Iranian revolution.[32] In this regard, John Foran draws attention to "political cultures of opposition" – that might be built on folk beliefs, and historical memories of struggle – in any society that played a critical role in the emergence of revolutionary coalition and the mobilization.[33]

Ironically, both the absence and the happening of revolutions in the Middle East is explained by the same culture and tradition. Certainly, culture and tradition, as stated by Skocpol and Foran acknowledged, may play critical role in different stage of the revolution in terms of organization and mobilization. But long-term political stability and stagnancy in the region despite the prevalence of numerous aging authoritarian regimes undercuts the explanatory power of culture. It would be meaningful once it is considered in combined with with other structural and contextual factors surrounding the revolutionary situations.

Conclusion

The essentialist views that highlight role of Arab-Islamic culture have come up with the denial of subjectivity of Middle Eastern people and led the relevant literature to focus on cultural studies. Likewise, long-lasting authoritarian regimes have led social scientists to study the persistence of authoritarianism. Combined with the controversy over definition of revolutions, the dominance of cultural studies and the problematique of authoritarianism may explain why social movements and revolutions are underexplored in the Middle East studies.

The phenomenon of revolution in the sense of the mobilization of wider segments of society around an idea or political and economic rights and freedoms; the takeover of ruling

[30] Bernard Lewis, "Islamic Revolution", *The New York Review of Books*, vol. 34, no. 21-22, 1988, p.46-50, http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1988/01/21/islamic-revolution/ .
[31] Lewis, "Islamic Concepts of Revolution", p.30-38.
[32] Theda Skocpol, "Rentier State and Shi'a Islam in the Iranian Revolution," *Theory and Society*, vol.11, no.3, 1982, p.265-83.
[33] John Foran, "Discourses and Social Forces: The Role of Culture and Cultural Studies in Understanding Revolutions", J. Foran (ed.), *Theorizing Revolutions,* London, Routledge, 1997, p.202-204.

regimes; and replacement of the old regimes with new values and institutions, however, is not new to the Middle East. It is not alien to the Arab-Islamic society, as well, as its proven by the five revolutionary waves in the region. Nonetheless, there are many factors – such as institutional, social and economic structures, international and geopolitical context, the utilization of violence, characteristics of leadership and revolutionary ideology – that are effective in the evolution of revolutionary situations. Various combination of each factors in each revolutionary cases may come up with different outcomes, which has necessitated further studies on revolutions in the Middle East.

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