



Revolution

ALICE WILSON, *University of Sussex*

Revolutions encompass political mobilizations that attempt rapid transformations of both the nature of political authority and wider social, political, and economic structures. Although early anthropology rarely addressed such movements or programmes for change directly, in recent years longstanding anthropological insights have helped shape an emerging field of the anthropology of revolution. Ethnographers' non state-centric approaches to studying political life have generated distinctive, and wide-ranging, insights into revolutionary movements and their attempts at social transformation. In-depth, long-term fieldwork highlights how revolutions involve not just transformations, but also continuities, contradictions, and slowly-unfolding legacies. Social life during revolution, even while experienced as exceptional and liminal, relates to political, economic, religious, and social phenomena before and after revolution. Ethnographic studies have also foregrounded contradictions and paradoxes surrounding official narratives of revolution as ordered teleology and emancipation from class-based, gendered, and racial marginalization. Finally, recent studies have foregrounded long-term legacies arising from divergent revolutionary outcomes.

Introduction

Whilst there are different ways of defining the term, revolutions as understood here encompass political mobilisations that attempt rapid transformations of both the nature of political authority and wider social, political, and economic structures. Activist and scholarly discussions of revolution address both *movements* of revolutionary activists, and *outcomes* such as the achievement (or not) of rapid transformations for which militants mobilise (see Bayat 2017: 15). The anthropological study of revolution in both these senses has begun to coalesce as a field of research relatively recently. Early generations of anthropologists had usually focused on social stability, rather than revolution. As the discipline changed in the latter decades of the twentieth century, however, anthropologists developed distinctive insights into revolutionary contexts. In doing so, at times anthropologists drew explicitly on longstanding insights into social life. Thus, the anthropology of revolution is both new and, in a sense, has deep roots.

For reasons of space, the present discussion does not extend to a review of related topics such as organised political violence, guerrilla fighters, insurgencies, and the responses of non-combatants to them (e.g. Hoffman 2011, Coulter 2009, Nordstrom 1997, Burnyeat 2018). Rather, the focus of this entry is a review of [ethnographic](#) and similarly rich qualitative studies (e.g. Shayne 2004, Vince 2010) which show how anthropologically-minded, non-state-centric analyses illuminate lived experiences of revolution. [Historical](#) and political science approaches have often focused on the conditions which lead to revolution, and the causes and scope of revolutionary outcomes (e.g. Tilly 1978: 189-222). This scholarship acknowledges that

seizing state power does not necessarily lead to the revolutionary transformation of society (Tilly 1978: 220). Anthropologists have also challenged the idea that revolutions entail the rapid transformation of social structures, in particular by highlighting their continuities, contradictions, and slowly-unfolding legacies.

This entry first addresses definitions of revolution. It then describes how longstanding anthropological accounts of ritual and kinship, and in particular the liminal stage of rites of passage (Turner 1967), provided for distinctive anthropological insight into revolution. The entry then identifies three areas of discussion which have emerged as a result of the way that anthropologists place revolution in wider social contexts. First, anthropologists have explored how social life during revolutions, even while experienced as exceptional and liminal, relates to political, economic, and religious life before and after they occur. Second, anthropologists have foregrounded contradictions and paradoxes surrounding official narratives of revolution as ordered teleology and emancipation from class-based, gendered, [racial](#), and other forms of marginalisation. Third, ethnographic studies have highlighted long-term legacies arising from divergent revolutionary outcomes.

Defining revolution

‘Revolution’ has two, apparently quite different, meanings in English (see Donham 1999: 1-2). The older meaning of revolution, prevalent until the Enlightenment, refers to ‘re-volution’, in the sense of the restoration of things to their original place. Such an interpretation corresponds to an understanding of time as cyclical. Time, in such an account, functions like planets revolving around the sun and returning eventually to their original place. Another pre-Enlightenment understanding of re-volution is the notion of the ‘wheel of fortune’: the metaphorical wheel revolves, causing people’s fortunes to rise and eventually fall back to an earlier position.ⁱⁱⁱ Prior to the Enlightenment, political events described as a revolution similarly referred to the restoration of a previous state of affairs. For example, in late sixteenth century France, Henri, King of Navarre (1553-1610 CE) was baptised a Catholic but raised by his mother in the Protestant faith. Nevertheless, when he became King of France in 1593, he converted to Catholicism in order to appease those opposed to a Protestant taking the French throne. Observers commented on his return to the Catholic faith as a ‘revolution’ (Donham 1999: 1-2).

A contrasting meaning of revolution came to the fore with the Enlightenment, however. This sense, which has become the predominant contemporary meaning, implies a reversal of social, political, and economic order. Thinking of revolution as reversal corresponds in turn to a notion of time as linear, not cyclical. From the late eighteenth century, Enlightenment [values](#) of belief in human rationality as a source of progress implied teleological understandings of time, and the assumption that humans could transform their political, economic, and social life for the better. Since the Enlightenment, the toppling of

monarchical and imperial regimes are known as the American, French, Haitian, Mexican and Russian Revolutions etc., reflecting teleological notions of time, the human capacity for progress, and an understanding of revolution as reversal. One of the most influential theories of revolution, Marxism, similarly takes revolution to be a reversal and a means of achieving progress towards the end point of socialism.

In accordance with this second meaning, narratives of revolutionaries since the Enlightenment depict revolutions as bringing about a reversal of existing orders – political, social, and economic – and the establishment of an alternative order. Definitions of revolution within the social sciences have sought to capture this sense of achieving not only political change, but also wider social change. One approach for doing so distinguishes ‘social revolutions’ from both ‘political revolutions’ and ‘economic revolutions’ (Skocpol 1979: 4-5). In this account, political revolutions might take the form of a coup d’état, and produce a change in those occupying government; economic revolutions, such as the Industrial Revolution, bring about a change in the organisation of production and distribution and, we might add, consumption. In theory, political revolution in this sense could take place without economic revolution, and vice versa. When two kinds of programmes for change combine, however, bringing together both change in the way that political authority (such as the state) is structured, and change in the way that social [relations](#) are ordered and inequalities legitimated (such as class, or gendered and generational relations), then this would amount to more than a political or economic revolution, but rather ‘social revolution’ (Skocpol 1979: 4-5).

The long-term, in-depth empirical inquiries of anthropologists and related scholars are well-placed to grant insight into those revolutions combining ambitions for political, economic, and social change. Revolutions thus defined entail

a fundamental and irreversible change in the organization of a society; the destruction, often rapid and violent, of a previous form of social and political organization, together with myths which sustained it and the ruling groups which it sustained, and their replacement by a new institutional order, sustained by new myths and sustaining new rulers (Clapham 1988: 1).

The scope of change extends to ‘a rapid, basic transformation of a society’s political structures’ and ‘an effort to transform not just the political institutions but also the justifications for political authority in society, thus reformulating the ideas/values that underpin political legitimacy’ (Thomassen 2012: 683). Importantly, anthropological studies draw attention to ways in which transformations take place as changes in everyday lives as ‘micro-processes’: that is, ‘a countlessly repeated uprooting of social relations, in thousands of local communities, in millions of lives’ (Donham 1999: 35).

The scope of revolutions necessarily varies across different contexts, as does the meaning of local terms used to mean ‘revolution’. Amongst the various terms used in other languages, several emphasise change

moving in a singular direction. For instance, the Arabic term is *thawra*, from the root 'to rise up'. The Chinese *fanshen* means 'to turn the body', used in the sense of standing up to oppression (Hinton 1966). The Quechua/Aymara term *pachakuti*, though, is more ambiguous: it combines 'upheaval' (*kuti*) and a term spanning both 'world balance' and 'space-time' (*pacha*). *Pachakuti* has been used since the sixteenth century to describe the catastrophe of Spain's invasion, but also since then to describe rebellions seeking to overcome [colonial](#) and neo-colonial rule and to restore indigenous world balance (Silva Rivera 1991, Swinehart 2019). Despite the emphasis on rupture/transformation across a range of terms as well as in definitions of revolution, echoes of the pre-Enlightenment understanding of revolution as a process of restoration nevertheless continue to haunt revolutionary movements and events in the post-Enlightenment period. Revolutions may re-establish the kinds of hierarchies that revolutionaries originally attempted to question – a sense of 'revolution as restoration' to which anthropological approaches have pointed.

A field takes shape

Early to mid-twentieth century anthropology focused on [colonised](#) peoples on the margins of capitalist economies. The early years of the discipline thus at first seem unpromising terrain for assessing revolutions. Nevertheless, one of anthropology's founding figures, Marcel Mauss, analysed Russia's Bolshevik revolutionary government as it unfolded in the years following the October 1917 revolution (Mauss 1984 [1924-5]). It was Mauss' work on [gifts](#), though, rather than on Bolshevism, which became foundational in anthropology. Arguing that gifts can create strong and lasting bonds between givers and recipients, Mauss stressed – crucially for his own and subsequent work on revolution – that some fields of social life, such as gift giving, interconnect with so many other aspects, such as politics, law, economics, religion, kinship, etc., that they are a 'total social phenomenon' (Mauss 1990 [1923-4]). Mauss recognised that revolutions – like gifts – connect many areas of social life: he saw the Russian Revolution as 'of special interest to the sociologist' because it was 'a gigantic social phenomenon' (Mauss 1984 [1924-5]: 336). Subsequent [ethnographic](#) accounts of revolution similarly embed the analysis of revolution in wide-ranging areas of social life.

Despite Mauss' interest in Bolshevism, early to mid-twentieth century anthropology neglected revolutionary movements. From the 1940s to the 1960s, the dominant theoretical school in British social anthropology was structural-functionalism. It assumed that persons and social institutions ultimately served the function of [reproducing](#) and maintaining the prevailing social order, and that society functioned as an isolated whole. Consequently, structural-functionalist studies sought to explain social stability and the reproduction of hierarchy in apparently unchanging societies. For instance, in the context of richer agriculturalists' dominance of poorer cattle herders among the Kpelle of central Liberia, a mid-twentieth century anthropological study analysed social rituals (Gibbs 1963; Gibbs, Breitrose & Silverman 1970). From a structural-functionalist perspective, Kpelle rituals – such as public dispute resolution councils and

the accompanying slaughtering of a calf for wide distribution of the meat – dissipated social tension whilst legitimising, reproducing, and entrenching existing hierarchies. To the extent that this kind of anthropological inquiry engaged with revolution, it did so indirectly by explaining why and how societies managed to *avoid* it.

Similarly, theoretical predisposition to see certain societies as static and unchanging prevented some anthropologists from recognising how revolutionary conditions emerge. In the 1960s and 1970s, there was a flourishing field of Andeanist studies. *Andeanismo*, or Andeanism, as a theoretical perspective assumed that Andean societies were largely pristine, unchanging cultures (Starn 1991). Andeanism was one of the factors which meant that most scholars during this period failed to acknowledge that in Peru there were growing connections between rural and urban communities, and that many Andean Peruvians desired to fight against conditions of poverty. Andeanism left ‘hundreds’ (Starn 1991: 63) of anthropologists surprised by, and struggling to explain, the outbreak in 1980 of Peru’s Maoist armed guerrillas, the Shining Path.

Although *andeanismo* clung to notions of social conservatism, in the 1960s and 1970s the problematic assumptions underpinning structural-functionalism became clearer. Anthropologists were increasingly critical of static notions of culture and social order (Geertz 1975, Clifford 1988), and of complicity with colonial domination of non-Western peoples (Asad 1973). Yet during this period, some earlier anthropological work on the reproduction of social structures emerged as the background for insight into revolution as a social process entailing – like other forms of ritual – rupture with, temporary suspension of, and then restoration of social order.

Drawing on fieldwork conducted in the 1950s with the Ndembu of then Northern Rhodesia (present day Zambia), Victor Turner studied the role of ritual in the transition from [childhood](#) to adulthood. Turner took inspiration from the work of Arnold van Gennep on rites of passage from one stage of the life course to another. Van Gennep (1960 [1909]) had suggested three stages in the rites of passage through the life course: separation, liminality, and re-aggregation. Turner (1967) suggested that four stages were at stake in ritual for transitioning to a new stage in the life course: breach, crisis, redress, and reintegration. He emphasised that during the phase of crisis (van Gennep’s liminal phase), there was a particular quality of social experience. Those involved experienced a temporary suspension of ordinary forms of hierarchy. During this crisis/liminal phase, persons acquired intense feelings of camaraderie for one another, which Turner called *communitas*. These feelings of *communitas* continued to underpin strong bonds between members of the same age set. These bonds lasted even after the phase of liminality ended, and ordinary social hierarchies were restored with each person taking up his or her place within those hierarchies.

Later, Turner (1988) applied his ideas about liminality and *communitas* to contemporary political contexts of revolution (see Thomassen 2012: 688). He suggested that movements seeking to reverse social order, such as revolutions, created spaces of liminality and *communitas*. From the anthropology of ritual, then,

emerged one of anthropology's most distinctive contributions to the analysis of revolutions: revolutionaries often experience their mobilisation as times and spaces of liminality or as the temporary cancellation of ordinary hierarchies. As is the case for the liminality of rites of passage (Turner 1967), revolutionaries may experience *communitas*, the intense solidarity amongst those who have shared extraordinary liminal circumstances. For instance, in the early 2000s, feelings of *communitas* bolstered young Iranians who engaged in rebellious acts that defied the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic (Mahdavi 2009). These young people considered themselves to be taking part in what they called a 'sexual revolution' (*enghelāb-e-jensi*) by [dancing](#), party-going, wearing attention-grabbing styles of clothing, and engaging in extra-marital sexual relations – activities all forbidden by the Islamic Republic. They were convinced that cumulatively these small acts of [resistance](#) questioned the legitimacy of the state. In the words of one young woman,

If any member of the morality police tries to touch me, I will scream at him, and everyone will support me. I can wear my nail polish, and my lipstick too! That means something. That means that we are getting to them, that we *do* have power (Mahdavi 2009: 122).

Anthropology's turn away from the static to the dynamic, and its increasing attempts to interrogate global and local power structures, saw late twentieth and early twenty-first century analyses of revolutions blossom in their thematic, temporal, and geographic coverage. To mention but a few studies, anthropologists have examined revolutionary life in: socialist societies and movements in Eastern Europe (Verdery 1996, Ledeneva 1998); [Latin America](#) (Rosdendahl 1997, Montoya 2012, Härkönen 2016); Asia (Humphrey 1983, Luong 1992, Yan 2003) and Africa (Lan 1985, Davis 1987, Donham 1999); the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran (Haeri 1989); the 1994 Zapatista guerrilla uprising against Mexico's [neoliberal](#) policies (Nash 2001, Speed 2008); and the Arab Spring revolutions (Bayat 2017). This scholarship takes inspiration from Turner's and Mauss' insights into the ways in which revolutions – even when participants experience them as liminal – connect with wider social, political, and economic structures and [values](#).

Placing revolutions in wider social contexts

We might expect that, as movements aspiring to achieve social and political transformations, revolutions rework political and economic life. But it is worth stressing the multiple ways in which revolutions draw upon religious life. Some religious orientations have famously inspired revolutionaries. Liberation theologians in [Latin America](#) in the 1960s and 1970s took inspiration from Christian faith to encourage political action to counter socioeconomic inequities (Gutiérrez 1974 [1971]). Connections between religious life and revolutionary action also exist for revolutionary movements which directly challenge institutionalised religion.

Turner's work established that revolution shares characteristics of religious ritual. Revolutions also connect with other aspects of religious and [moral](#) life. Their discourse can assume the qualities of demand

for self-sacrifice. In socialist Cuba, revolutionary subjects experience, talk about, and at times put into practice a commitment of self-sacrifice for the revolution, even to the point of expressing the righteousness of being willing to die for it (Holbraad 2014). Cubans distinguish between the revolutionary principles to which they feel loyal, and disappointment with everyday living conditions in revolutionary Cuba. Their views that the revolution deserves self-sacrifice withstand their complaints about everyday shortcomings (Holbraad 2014: 6).

Another parallel between religious and revolutionary social life concerns injunctions to preserve 'purity'. Just as some devotees are meant to keep themselves 'pure' from threats such as sin and pollution, revolutionary cadres may face pressure to keep themselves 'pure' by distinguishing themselves from the masses who have not yet acquired sufficient revolutionary credentials. This was the case in Sri Lanka in the 1980s for cadres serving with the Liberation Tigers for Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the areas under the movement's control (Thiranagama 2011: 212). Overtly, the LTTE sought to distance itself from Hinduism and its taboos about specific categories of people maintaining their social purity through the avoidance of contact with polluting persons and matter. Nevertheless, the movement itself engaged in 'constant purification' to reinforce cadres as a special category distinct from the wider population - with this separation ultimately constraining the movement's ability to transform Tamil society (Thiranagama 2011: 212).

Revolutionaries can also echo devotees in their concerns to respect a higher moral order. In the northwest Sahara, from the 1970s to the present day, Sahrawi revolutionaries hailing from the Polisario Front, the liberation movement which seeks to liberate the disputed Western Sahara from Moroccan annexation, have sought to transform Sahrawi society. These revolutionaries live in exile in autonomously run refugee camps in southwest Algeria. On the one hand, the refugees and their government experience their revolution as a new social contract introducing a new governing authority - their (partially recognised) Sahrawi state authority - which replaces [tribal](#) authority (Wilson 2016b).ⁱⁱⁱ On the other hand, though, Sahrawi refugees also experience their revolution as a new moral contract between governing authorities and governed constituencies (Wilson 2016b: 238-43). This moral contract emphasises that each party expects the other to put the interests of national liberation and the revolution above narrower interests of personal or familial gain. This moral contract determines whether or not refugees consider the government's discretionary distribution of resources, such as extra rations and travel opportunities, as corruption or not, and whether officials consider refugees to have deserving claims on them. This notion of revolution as a *moral* contract has proved enduring in exile. Over time, tribes have partially re-emerged amongst Sahrawi refugees as influential in areas of governance such as dispute resolution and elections, suggesting that the revolution as *social* contract has modified. But the sense of revolution as a moral contract, entailing injunctions for parties to live up to moral norms, has persisted.

Another link between religion and revolution is that religious dispositions can provide pathways for joining a revolutionary movement. In India in the 1970s, a Maoist guerrilla movement, the Naxalites, emerged to oppose the Indian state. With the Indian state fighting back against them, by the 2000s Maoist militants were operating under cover in terrains such as the jungles of Jharkhand. The marginalisation of Jharkhand's tribal populations also motivated locals to support, and sometimes join, insurgents who were intent upon challenging that marginalisation (Shah 2014). The guerrillas were expected to give up personal ties; but before becoming revolutionaries, many senior guerrilla leaders had in their youth been religious renouncers who had already abandoned personal possessions and ties. Religious orientation can thus prepare the way for revolutionary commitment.

To explain the endurance of the Naxalite movement, Shah (2014) nevertheless stresses *both* cultural factors (such as religious practice) *and* political and economic factors (such as the exploitation and marginalisation of India's tribal communities in Jharkhand). She echoes Mauss' emphasis on the interconnection in revolutions of cultural, religious, political, and economic life. In addition to the many ways in which revolutions can resemble religious life, they also draw on longstanding political and economic forms.

The revolutionary reworking of existing political forms can be seen in a Shiraz village during the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 (Hegland 2013). Villagers perceived political life as a set of potential conflicts between *taifeh* (tribal) groups. Villagers understood these groups to be dynamic coalitions of persons with shared interests that brought together and surpassed kinship groups. When conflicts arose, belligerents mobilised *taifeh* connections until one group prevailed and the conflict was resolved. In the build-up to 1979, the Shah's increased political repression had disposed most villagers towards revolt; nevertheless, the specific way in which male and female villagers took the decision to join in protests derived from their understanding of *taifeh* conflicts. A villager associated with the Shah's supporters assaulted another villager opposed to the Shah. This incident led other villagers to mobilise, just as they would have for a conflict between *taifeh* groups, and join anti-Shah protests. Pre-existing political [values](#) and structures, here entailing tribal conflict, shaped participation in the revolution, even though the latter came to present itself as a form of rupture with the past. Interestingly, longstanding political values both facilitated, and at the same time were transformed through, revolutionary participation. Where villagers had not previously recognised women's contributions to village political networks, they acknowledged women's contributions to revolutionary action (Hegland 2013: 189).

Previous economic forms influenced the shape of revolutionary structures amongst Western Sahara's revolutionaries in exile in Algeria (Wilson 2016b: 136-40). From the formation of the refugee camps in 1976 into the 2000s, the refugee government and liberation movement, Polisario Front, recruited unwaged [labour](#) from refugees to staff social services and ministries. By the 2000s, however, refugees expected to earn [money](#) to compensate for decreasing rations. By the mid 2000s, Polisario Front was having to pay

teachers, doctors, and [bureaucrats](#) (low and irregular) wages. Yet amid expectations of wages, one form of unwaged labour survived: 'work party' events known as a *hamla* (campaign). These work parties were a reworking-cum-transformation of local labour-pooling known as *twiza*. *Hamla* and *twiza* shared characteristics such as sex-segregation, a light-hearted [atmosphere](#), and an expectation that organisers provide some drink/food as hospitality. The transformation was that where *twiza* had relied on tribal networks, the revolutionary government recruited *hamla* participants (and also provided the hospitality). In sum, the creation of revolutionary forms of state power can rely on recycling pre-existing economic, political, and social forms.

Paradoxes and contradictions within revolutions

Revolutionary activists and leaders typically stress their intentions to achieve social, political, and economic change – and anthropological work often challenges this by showing how revolutions rework existing social forms. This combination of rupture and continuity constitutes a contradiction among the many paradoxes within revolutions. Anthropologists are not alone in observing these contradictions. Many revolutions – the American (1765-1783), French (1789), Russian (1917), amongst others – have claimed to promote emancipation but have nevertheless preserved or established forms of subjugation. It is also well known that revolutionaries who in theory support, for example, women's emancipation may expect women to put gender-specific demands 'on hold' whilst the 'higher' goals of capturing state power are achieved, as was the case amongst Sandinistas in Nicaragua in the 1980s (Molyneux 1985). Revolutionary vanguards also tend to mobilise mass supporters less well-versed in revolutionary discourse than cadres. These supporters may have rebelled for the 'wrong' reasons, leading to the paradox that vanguards who seize power expunge revolutionaries deemed ideologically deficient from [historical](#) narratives (Scott 1979). Further revolutionary paradoxes and contradictions come to light through [ethnographic](#) studies.

There have been many paradoxes concerning the revolutionary promotion of gendered forms of emancipation. Socialist revolutionary societies have focused on increasing women's labour force participation, assuming that achieving (more) equal rights for men and women as workers will achieve broader gender parity. Nevertheless, women are usually still left with the main responsibilities of [homemaking](#), in addition to being political activists. This leaves women in revolutionary societies with a 'triple burden' of waged [labour](#), domestic duties, and political activism (Verdery 1996: 65). In socialist Cuba, another paradox is that the state's provision for women's practical needs, such as labour force participation and childcare, has, in some Cubans' eyes, diminished the possibilities for the development of autonomous feminist activism (Shayne 2004: 152). Revolutionary agendas to promote gendered emancipation can be fraught with contradiction.

It is far from guaranteed that women who participated in revolutionary action, including by taking up arms, feel recognised for their efforts either by a revolutionary government or by peers. Women revolutionaries

may afterwards be treated by peers as if they are polluted, as was the case for some Algerian female revolutionaries whose [moral](#) propriety male peers questioned (Vince 2016: 140-1). Former members of Mozambique's elite female Frelimo detachment similarly bemoaned that male co-fighters were unwilling to choose female combatants as spouses, preferring instead to marry women whom they perceived would be more compliant (West 2000). [Egalitarian](#) values do not always travel smoothly from slogans to everyday lived experience.

Just as promises of revolutionary gendered emancipation meet contradictions in practice, official narratives of revolutionary origins and outcomes can face competing personal experiences. The 1974 Ethiopian revolution established a Marxist-Leninist state. After the coup, Amharic-speaking members of the revolutionary vanguard set out to bring the revolution and its promise of modernisation to remote regions, including that of the Maale people in the South (Donham 1999). Maale subjective experiences, however, disrupted the narrative that the revolution brought modernisation. The Maale had already experienced a 'pre-revolution' of rupture to their traditional social order during Protestant missionary activity (Donham 1999: 82-101). Furthermore, Amharic conquest in the late nineteenth century had already so transformed Maale traditional kingship that when revolutionary students destroyed symbols of Maale kingship, some locals interpreted this as the *restoration* of earlier (pre Amharic-conquest) tradition (Donham 1999: 59-81). The Maale case also contradicted theoretical expectations that the relatively affluent 'middle' level of peasants would be more likely to embrace revolution than their more indigent, oppressed peers. Eric Wolf (1969) theorised that the poorest peasants would be too downtrodden to rebel. In fact, those Maale who most readily mobilised as revolutionaries hailed from the poorer converts to Christianity rather than middle-ranking Maale traditionalists (Donham 1999: 46). Popular experience of revolution can contradict officially promoted intentions and expectations.

One consequence of the origins and results of revolutions playing out quite differently from participants' expectations is that many revolutionaries end up feeling disillusioned. They feel disappointed with the outcomes after their extraordinary and painful efforts and sacrifices. Revolutionary disappointment stretches from former female fighters in Mozambique (West 2000) to mid-level cadres and rank-and-file activists in El Salvador's Farabundo Martí liberation front turned peacetime political party (Sprenkels 2018). In a Mexican town that was one of the first to join the country's 1910 revolution, locals in the 1980s felt like 'spent cartridges of revolution' because they found themselves still fighting the same struggles over land and labour (Nugent 1993). The emotional experience characteristic of revolution can shift over time from *communitas* to disillusion.

Yet paradoxes can emerge even in cases of revolutionary disappointment: those who are disenchanted with socialism in Cuba still feel loyalty to the revolution (Holbraad 2014). In Egypt, many who mobilised in 2011 to depose President Mubarak felt, once the military deposed [democratically](#) elected President Morsi in 2013, that the revolution had failed to transform state power and social life. But many still experienced

enormous change in their personal lives – as if there was a lasting, intimate effect of *communitas* as people questioned old bonds and forged new ones. One Egyptian activist noted,

[S]o much was revealed about people around us... irreconcilable differences in values were revealed. When a group of people are killed and one person reacts by celebrating and the other by mourning... what happens next? There were divorces, estrangement, other big rifts within families (Fernández-Savater *et al.* 2017: 146-7).

Personal and national experiences of revolutionary rupture and continuity intersect and can indeed contradict one another.

A further, and profound, revolutionary paradox lies in the merging of the two meanings of revolution as transformation and restoration. Revolutionary movements which seek to undo old hierarchies frequently end up creating new kinds of hierarchies, such as between vanguards and to-be-enlightened masses (Donham 1999, Thiranagama 2011) or between those given priority for accessing resources and those excluded (Wilson 2016b: 233-4). In diverse ways, revolutions can end up establishing at least in part a re-aggregation or reintegration of social and political hierarchy.

Legacies of revolution

Anthropologists have studied revolutions as participants and activists (Cabarrús 1983, Speed 2008), as concerned locally employed researchers (Bourdieu & Sayad 1964), and as fieldworkers who happened to be there when revolution erupts (Donham 1999, Hegland 2013). Being *in situ* during a revolution can nevertheless mean being one of the ‘hidden majority’ excluded from accessing iconic demonstration spaces – such as Cairo’s Tahrir square during the 2011 anti-Mubarak protests – and who instead encounter promises of political transformation whilst confined to safer domestic spaces (Winegar 2012). But even when anthropologists cannot conduct fieldwork during revolution, their long-term engagements with interlocutors lead to rich understandings of the legacies of revolutionary movements across varied outcomes not limited to self-proclaimed revolutionary states.

Revolutionary legacies play out in contexts of ambiguity in revolutionary outcomes. The end of revolutionary insurgency and its control over state power does not necessarily mean the end of revolutionary influence. In Nicaragua during the 1990s, a [neoliberal](#) government proposed policies that would undo many forms of social protection and progressivism achieved during Sandinista revolutionary rule in the 1980s. Nevertheless, new social movements emerged through which people mobilised to [resist](#) neoliberal policies and preserve revolutionary social achievements (Babb 2001). Thus ‘it may be precisely after the revolution that the long struggle for democratisation and economic justice will be waged’ (Babb 2001: 15-6). In El Salvador in 2009, the Farabundo Martí liberation front became the first revolutionary movement in [Latin America](#) which, having failed to achieve power through insurgency, took power instead

through elections. The ties between erstwhile combatants and revolutionary activists lent themselves to being recycled into ties of electoral clientelism which contributed to the party's success – despite the fact that many El Salvadorans at the same time felt disillusioned with the recognition they received from their movement-turned-party (Sprenkels 2018). Just as revolutions rework existing social [relations](#), people rework revolutionary social forms and ties as they build post-revolutionary lives and projects.

Close attention to the everyday lives of former revolutionaries opens up the question of when and how revolutions end. In Algeria, official [historical](#) narratives focus on the National Liberation Front's successful achievement of independence and takeover of the government. Life histories of female revolutionary activists from independence in 1962 to the 1990s nevertheless show the many challenges that these women faced in gaining recognition for their contributions and in participating in political and economic life. Yet the women concerned did not necessarily experience this as a sign that the revolution failed, but rather that it had not ended (Vince 2016: 174).

The everyday sociality of defeated revolutionaries who live in conditions of political marginalisation and repression can also call into question the ending of defeated revolutions. In Dhufar, southern Oman, four decades after the 1975 defeat of Dhufar's erstwhile revolutionary liberation movement, former members socialised in mixed-[race](#), mixed-[tribal](#) gatherings that [reproduced](#) social egalitarian [values](#) associated with the revolution (Wilson 2019). Bonds of *communitas* between those who experienced revolutionary liminality can outlive the revolutionary liminal period itself. Furthermore, Dhufar continues to produce new platforms for progressive politics in elections and during Oman's Arab Spring protests (Wilson 2016a). The defeat of a revolution, then, does not preclude later mobilisation echoing earlier demands for social, political, and economic inclusion and participation. Meanwhile in India, former Maoist Naxalite militants demonstrate lasting social consequences of their militancy. When they were Naxalite revolutionaries in their youth in the 1970s, these men questioned conservative norms of [masculinity](#). Decades later, aged in their fifties to eighties, these men continued to question conservative gender norms even after political defeat. They avoided conforming to dominant models of South Asian masculinity of renouncers (those who renounce personal possessions and attachments) or [householders](#) (those who take on the responsibilities of heading a household) (Donner 2009). Defeated revolution can have a 'social afterlife' (Wilson 2019) whereby networks, values, subjectivities, and identities produced through it 'cannot just be resolved or cast away' but 'have to be negotiated anew' (Thiranagama 2011: 12).

The long-term legacies of the recent revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, and the revolutions-turned-civil-wars in Syria and Yemen, are still in the making. Egyptian workers set up revolutionary institutions to organise [labour](#) after the 2011 anti-Mubarak revolution. President Sisi's counterrevolution repressed workers' organisation – but younger workers' adoption during their revolutionary organisation of new values of [egalitarianism](#) created a legacy of novel values with the potential to outlast more transient institutions (Makram-Ebeid 2014). In Tunisia, the world watched the dramatic events of the Jasmine revolution in

2010-2011, which deposed President Ben Ali. Media stories subsequently moved on, but years of work lie ahead in creating the political aperture for which protesters mobilised. Youth activists who seek to support their country's transition to [democracy](#) through participation in democracy-promotion workshops must strike a balance between making their efforts legible for international funders whilst maintaining locally meaningful forms of engagement (Boutieri 2015). Whatever revolutions' successes and failures in the eyes of their participants and opponents, legacies of movements and militants' plans for social change unfold over years.

Anthropologies of revolutions

From having been a discipline which mostly overlooked the possibility for revolution, anthropology has produced distinctive insights into the social, political, economic, and [moral](#) lives of revolutionaries. A sub-field of an anthropology of revolution – or rather anthropologies of revolutions, given the range of approaches therein – is emerging in anthropologists' teaching and [writing](#) for audiences in the academy (e.g. Thomassen 2012, Holbraad *et al.* forthcoming) and beyond (Shah 2018, Starn & La Serna 2019). Anthropological accounts of revolution both underscore the tension between revolutionary liminality and connections with wider social life, and foreground ambivalent experiences of revolution: rupture and continuity intersect, transformation overlaps with restoration of hierarchical social order, and lived experiences contest clear beginnings and endings. Ongoing studies of revolution in anthropology, and beyond, are strengthened by placing the experiences of those living through, with, and after revolution in wider social and temporal contexts.

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Note on contributor

Alice Wilson is Senior Lecturer in Social Anthropology at the University of Sussex. Her research examines legacies of radical projects for social change in revolutions and liberation movements in the Middle East and North Africa. She is the author of *Sovereignty in exile: a Saharan liberation movement governs* (University of Pennsylvania, 2016).

Dr Alice Wilson, Department of Anthropology, School of Global Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, BN1 9SJ, United Kingdom. alice.wilson@sussex.ac.uk.

[1] British Library 2012. The wheel of fortune. *Medieval Manuscripts Blog* (available on-line: <https://blogs.bl.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/2012/02/the-wheel-of-fortune.html>).

[2] The English term 'tribe' and its derivatives have problematic connotations when it comes to translating and theorising indigenous social forms, such as Sahrawis' *qabila* or Iranians' *taifeh*. See Sneath, D. 2016. Tribe. *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology* (available on-line: <https://www.anthroencyclopedia.com/entry/tribe>).