



"Aspects of the Intellectual and Social History of the Greek Revolution"

2nd session

'The concept and the reality of revolution in the 21th century. Philosophical, political and anthropological challenges'

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Abstracts

Was the Greek Revolution of 1821 "Bourgeois"?

Nicholas Vrousalis, Erasmus University Rotterdam

The idea of bourgeois revolution is central to the modern historiography of revolution: it purports to explain central features of the Dutch, English, and French revolutions by subsuming them under a unified explanatory scheme. This paper examines the claim that the Greek Revolution of 1821 can be subsumed under this unified scheme. I argue that, if the subsumption is to work, then the whole categorial framework of bourgeois revolution needs to be rethought along a number of dimensions. First, the relevant conception of revolutionary agency must be weakened to include merchants and military leaders, including the upper strata of the klephts. This must be done with care, as defining a revolution solely in terms of its consequences—without reference to the agency that brings these consequences about—renders the very idea of bourgeois revolution incoherent. Second, the theory must explain the alliance of this ascending ruling class with popular classes who, in the case of Ottoman Greece, were mostly independent farmers and not wage labourers. Third, it must systematically connect these alliances with at least an inchoate movement of opposition to the tributary mode of production—not to European-style feudalism—and explain how that opposition facilitated the ascendancy of the capitalist mode of production in the newly-founded Greek state.

The fragmented revolution? Struggles against domination and the defence of the lifeworld

Judith Vega, University of Groningen

Around the world, a wave of civic protests is again alerting us to various kinds of injustices. Societal transformation is firmly on the agenda, from revolts in the Middle East, Occupy Wallstreet, Women Marches, BLM, subnational movements, refusal of the refugee camp, to the concerns with ecological disaster, or Big Tech. These protests express discontent with the ways in which economic and statist forces have impacted negatively on people's lifeworlds. The very diversity of the discontentment, in respect of its sources, objectives, and ideologies, makes it daring to assemble it under one concept. It seems moot to draw on the concept of revolution for reflecting on what is happening; then again, we might hesitate to swiftly reject it. Revolution is the word par excellence to capture and reference a

utopian energy about to set societies in motion, to suggest the possibility of founding – hence of expressing freedom – by the people. On the other hand, it seems ill-suited to 21st century times, being associated with the large uprootings of systems from the eighteenth century Atlantic Revolutions to the early twentieth century Russian Revolution, or, less central to western political philosophy, the Chinese and Iranian ones. It moreover suggests the grand pathos and bloody tracks of these famous upheavals – not the best way to envision the constituent power of citizens.

Can the landmark distinctions given us by Marx or Arendt – between bourgeois and communist, or political and social revolutions – still help in guiding our reflections? A vast body of literature posits a tight bond between revolution and law, marrying the concept of revolution to ‘legal revolution’. As an alternative, can we conceptualise revolution beyond the appeal to law that sets off the Benjaminian vicious cycle of violence, and use it for grasping action directed towards the decolonisation of the lifeworld?

Celebrating revolutions, adjusting definitions

Anna Mahera, University of Ioannina

The paper examines the celebration of the bicentennial of the French Revolution in 1989 and the celebration of the centennial of the Russian Revolution in 2017 as opportunities for reappraisals of the events and their impact on the historiography of revolutions. As founding events of societies, revolutions are always highly sensitive to the passage of time and to the conjectures, contingencies and needs of the present. Even if their celebration allows scholars to reintegrate their research into the political discourse and thus risk to succumb to presentism and moralism at the expense of historical empathy, it reorients historiography in directions that will define the future course of the study of revolutions. My presentation will focus on the redefinitions of the study of the French and Russian Revolutions in 1989 and 2017 and their impact on the genealogy of the historiography of revolutions.