THE CONSENSUS-SEEKING TEMPTATION
IN POST-REVOLUTIONARY SOCIETIES

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Abstract

The paper investigates the role that nationalism can play in shaping post-revolutionary political dynamics. Nationalism is therefore considered a consequence of a sudden and visible process of questioning the legitimacy of extant political rules and institutions. By defining revolutions in political terms, nationalism is treated not as the main driving ideological force behind the transformation of the regime, but as a reaction to perceived dangers the national identity and unity are facing; the necessary answer to an ontological threat to national security. Hence, revolution gains social significance in nationalist terms. The process is explained by what the author coins as the 'consensus-seeking temptation'. Collective actions successful in overthrowing authoritarian regimes conserve and reinforce the dominant anti-liberal component of the political culture. Nationalism thus extracts the anti-liberal values (in particular the anti-individualistic ones) of the 'ancien régime' and gives them a new collective meaning in the post-revolutionary order. The conceptual apparatus used in studying the emerging post-revolutionary order is based on a conceptual triad encompassing 'revolution', 'nation' and 'security', within a constructivist theoretical framework. By following in particular the case of the 1989 Romanian Revolution, the authors suggest the triad can prove to be a suitable instrument for a better understanding of the post-revolutionary societal dynamics.

Keywords: revolution, nationalism, security, collective action

1. Introduction

The paper aims to respond to three challenges the study of revolution currently faces. While Political science has developed over the time a complex and impressive array of theoretical underpinnings, several problems still face the scholar of revolutions. First and foremost, there are very few works covering the impact of revolution on international relations. Secondly, while several works have focused on the influence culture and ideology have on the revolutionary dynamic; very few accounts on the importance of nationalism exist. Third, I

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believe that the appeal to agency and culture gains significance only if revolution is studied from an interpretative and highly contextualized perspective.

The concept of revolution and the phenomenon itself have raised numerous debates in regards to numerous adjacent concepts and political developments. While numerous authors have always emphasized the tremendous effects revolutions have not only on the society that experience the revolution or on the political institutions being radically transformed by the revolutionary wave [1], scholars have also tried to encompass the effects revolution has on international politics, either from the perspective of the English School [2] or from that of neo-realism [3].

Moreover, the study looks at revolution from a constructivist perspective. The appeal to social constructivism has the potential to look beyond the limits of current theories of revolution and to offer an adequate answer to the calling for a greater integration of agency and culture into the study of revolutions.

Last, but not least, the focus on culture and ideology needs to move beyond the simple debate as to whether ideology and culture is one of the causal factors of revolution. While not adhering to a sequential view on the importance of ideology [4], the paper tries to assess the importance of nationalism as a prominent phenomenon in the revolutionary dynamic.

2. Revolutions and international relations

In spite of the important effects revolutions have on international relations, there are few contributions that try to ascertain the precise influence internal revolutionary dynamics may have on international politics. Martin Wight is one of the earliest writers to focus on the role revolutionary power play in international relations by challenging the established norms of international behaviour, acting as revisionist actors and ending up as imperialist powers determined to export political models [1]. It is important to note that Wight insists not only on the behaviour of revolutionary regimes, but also on the manner in which revolutionary ideas affect established patterns of politic legitimacy (the opposition between dynastic sovereignty and popular sovereignty, for example). This last idea marks the transition towards Wight's insistence on a wider intellectual tradition fundamental alongside realism and rationalism to the development of international relations. The 'revolutionist' tradition argues in favour of the possibility of transgressing beyond a society of states, by virtue of the imperatives inherent to the human condition [5].

As far as theories of revolution are concerned, international relations and international dynamics can serve at best as a structural determinant of the revolution's outbreak; little attention is given by the revolution's foreign impact. Structural theorists argue for example that the competitive nature of the state system makes particular states more prone to experiencing revolutionary crises [6]. Theories of revolution emphasize either the importance of a global economic context in the causal dynamics of revolution [7], or the nature of the

system of states, as another structural determinant of the crisis of the 'ancien régime'. It is important however to notice that theorists of revolution make no connection to debate within the field of international relations regarding the influence international politics has on domestic politics [8] or the constraining influence of the international system on state actions [9].

The third relevant aspect is the attention given to the expansion of 'revolutionary waves', which undermine successive regimes without direct interventions of revolutionary powers. The verdict is still out on the expansive character of revolutions, scholars considering them capable of transforming the international environment [10] or rather overestimated events that while being one of the causes of war are hard to export by military means.

What brings together all these accounts is their causal approach to the interplay between revolutions and international politics. While the lack of a systematic approach proves the difficulty inherent to drawing explanations for this relationship, shifting the epistemic perspective towards a non-causal approach offers increasing perspectives of appraising the impact revolutions have on the international environment.

Hence, while it is true that some revolutions are inextricably linked with wars (the French Revolutionary Wars for example) a more successful undertaking of understanding the complex relationship between the two phenomena can be achieved if stepping away from the simple causal framing of events: wars that cause revolutions and revolutions causing war. I believe that a more promising undertaking is looking at revolutions and international dynamics in co-constitutive terms [11].

I believe therefore that looking at the relationship between revolution and security in a co-constitutive manner, within a constructivist framework, has the possibility to account both for the manner in which international relations affect revolutions and for the manner in which revolutions mark the international dynamics. Revolutions in fact expand the accepted meaning of security – the significance of this expansion is similar but does not operate by the same mechanisms described by the Copenhagen School [12]. Revolutions entail changes in the definition of security, its object and its referent. They are acts of collective questioning of whose and what values are threatened, by whom and of the measures that can be adopted for their defence. If revolutions are changes of the structure of existing norms and of the shared meaning associated with them, they also alter the patterns of perceived security/insecurity or enmity. Dynamics in international politics during revolutionary moments do not exist outside the shared reality of revolution. The revolution is therefore accompanied by the imposition different referent of security (be it the nation, *le tiers-état* or the social class) and inherently a different hierarchy of security threats and actions available to the revolutionary regime. Moreover, by looking at the interplay between revolution and security in a co-constitutive manner, one can more easily account for the identification of the internal threats to national security. However, as part of the interpretative intellectual tradition [13], this attempt is highly contextualized.

Moreover, this relationship must not be understood as a complete reversal or change of the referents or of the object of security. On the contrary, giving credit to Tocqueville, numerous aspects of the *ancien régime* survive revolution and can become prominent in the revolutionary dynamic itself [14]. For example, while the Romanian Revolution of 1989 can be seen as a reversal of security priorities, in that the main existential threat is no longer a military one represented by the Western camp. The ambiguity of the relations with the USSR [15], the resurgence of the nationalist ethos that sees minorities as enemies of the nation (albeit in a different manner that I will detail below) and the increased fears of a Hungarian action [16] are clear elements that show continuity with the pre-revolutionary framing of security.

If security is socially constructed and the revolution alters its understanding and its meaning, social actors „are likely to construct a revolutionary *bricolage*, a vocabulary of words and concepts from a variety of sources forged by people into some sort of practical ideology with which they confront the inequities and exigencies of their time and place [...] while retaining important contextual links to the past" [17].

3. Agency, culture and revolution

Theorists of revolution have repeatedly tried to move beyond the problems exhibited by the structural approach to the study of revolutions. Theories emphasizing the role of economic or political structures or the interplay between the autonomous state and the different elites have managed to offer an accurate explanation of revolutions. Moreover, stepping in the footsteps of Barrington Moore, structural theories have also tried to develop an account of the consequences of revolutionary events and map pout the distinct characteristics of the post-revolutionary regime [18]. However, their inability to explain for the pervasive instability states find themselves confronted with, their limited predictive capacity [19], as well as their disinterest for the role of ideology [20], stand out as problems that need to be addressed by the new generations of scholars of revolution.

The task of the fourth generation of theorists is therefore to move beyond structures and offer answers to these theoretical short-comings. While there is a great variety of lines of inquiry that can be pursued ("economic downturns, cultures of rebellion, dependent development, population pressures, colonial or personalistic regime structures, cross-class coalitions, loss of nationalist credentials, military defection, the spread of revolutionary ideology" [21]), the most promising avenue is the resort to agency and to culture [22]. Culture and agency are capable of both moving beyond the somewhat overly-deterministic character of structural theories and explain recent revolutionary events. However, the appeal to agency and culture is not in itself a solution, nor does it represent a paradigm shift, in spite of Foran's insistence.

Agency can easily fit within an explanatory framework that combines structural constraints with rational choice theory, as Taylor [23], Aya [24] as well as Muller and Weede [25] conclusively show. Culture as well, can easily be construed as another constraining structure, which operates in the same causal/functional way as economic or political structures do [26].

I propose that by adopting a moderate constructivist perspective on revolution, following the theoretical framework of John Searle, an answer can be given to calls for greater emphasis on agency and culture. The view on revolution is based on several assumptions: the existence of a collective intentionality, the existence of a hierarchy of constitutive rules and the collective attribution of agentive functions.

I am in agreement with Searle's argument that collective intentionality does not need to be proven: it is just the shared feeling of doing something meaningful *together* [27]. While individuals might have individual motivations and their performances might have individual significance, collective intentionality acts gain purposeful meaning only within interactional contexts (football players, referees and spectators perform individual actions, but only being together at a football game gives meaning to the context to which they take part).

'Constitutive' rules are the opposite of 'regulative' rules. Following Searle's distinction, regulative rules regulate activities that precede them, whereas constitutive rules create the very possibility of the actions they regulate (the rules concerning government create the possibility of governing and being governed, for example).

Agentive functions are functions that are not intrinsic to a particular phenomenon, but are observer–relative (they are imposed in view of the observer's interests). However, as Searle argues, they are not purely practical. They do not depend on maintaining a continuous acceptance of their meaning (they subsist even if the motivation for their initial imposition is no longer apparent to the individuals). Constitutive rules are organized and gain meaning only within a hierarchy which is defined by the ease with which agentive functions can be attributed via collectively intentional actions – regime change, in this view, is easier to accomplish by the collectively intentional action of attributing agentive functions than is changing the constitutive rules regarding family [27, p. 20].

Revolution, in this view, is the collectively intentional process of withdrawing or altering the meaning of several constitutive rules, by imposing alternative agentive functions on different socially relevant acts (governance, economic structure, property), altering the top hierarchy of constitutive rules. The consistency of the constitutive functions of the Romanian Communist regime did not depend on its material repressive capacities (which were unhindered up to a late point in the dynamic of the revolution), but to the collective acceptance of its meaning. The revolution becomes relevant as individuals, acting in a collectively intentional manner, disregarded the

significance of the constitutive rules of the regime – they started acting *as if* the repressive and political institutions of the regime no longer existed.

It is interesting to note that the hierarchic nature of the constitutive rules has the potential to shed light, at least partially, into the post-revolutionary dynamics. The fact that in the Romanian case the revolution broke down into a political dispute in regards to the 'true nature' of the Revolution or its true objectives can be explained not only by looking at the intentions or the actions of the leading political actors. The deconstruction process reaches the limits of the hierarchy of constitutive norms, at which point conflicting views on the scope and dimension of the revolutionary process itself come to bear.

4. Nationalism and revolution

The occurrence of nationalism during revolutionary moments is inextricably linked with the collectively intentional character of the revolution itself. The influence of nationalism is explained by the concept of *consensus-seeking temptation*. Nationalism and the consensus-seeking temptation can be seen as co-constitutive factors that result from the breakdown of the pre-revolutionary order. Together, they play a major role in shaping the post-revolutionary order.

In the Romanian case, the deconstruction of the upper level constitutive rules – the Communist regime, the primacy of the Communist party – by a process of collective withdrawal of significance reaches the limits that are defined by the hierarchy of constitutive rules itself. The image/myth of the nation can be seen in the Romanian case as one of the limits that deconstruction can reach. If class and party are gone as simple fictions, since the Romanian revolutionists acted *as if* they did no longer exist, the nation remains – in the speech acts and in the political actions of the leading actors, 'a reality' that is beyond question.

I am not arguing that the nation is in itself only an 'imagined community' whose social reality seems more encompassing than other socially-shared constructs [28]. The revolution can fall back on nationalism because in the Romanian case, the nation is a constitutive rule that, for a variety of reasons (the promotion of a nationalist outlook by several successive regimes, for example), is simply harder to deconstruct than others and because several other constitutive rules are highly dependent on its socially shared existence.

Moreover, nationalism is the by-product of deconstruction because of its collective intentional aspect. The feeling of 'togetherness' that accompanies the revolutionary moment tends to generate a predisposition towards actions of functional attributions that are perceived as consensual, if not collective. Given the limits the deconstruction process can reach, the apparition of conflicting views is not only a possible consequence of the unwillingness to move towards constructing additional constitutive norms, but also a threat towards the mechanism of collective imposition of meanings itself. It is for this reasons that one of the major debates of the post-revolutionary period revolves around the

'true nature' of the revolution and the conflicting view on it – the spontaneous collective uprising and the victorious planned coup d'état [29].

At the same time, nationalism is not simply a functional ideological formula that is revived by revolution. As any other social *bricolage*, it exhibits the same confusing signs of continuity and discontinuity.

Nationalism therefore accompanies the breakdown of the unlikely revolutionary coalition as deconstruction becomes itself a contentious issue. Because of the consensus-seeking temptation however, the revolutionary "dissidents" are seen as threats to the collective mechanism that has become a part of the immediate post-revolutionary dynamics. The consensus-seeking temptation seeks to legitimize and institutionalize the collective intentional acts of the revolution in front of increasing challenges from competing and already partisan agendas and interests, ensuring the survival, in the Romanian case, of several illiberal hallmarks of the *ancien régime.* Moreover, the image of the 'nation' reinforces almost dialectically the consensus-seeking temptation.

Nationalism and the consensus-seeking temptation account for the reasons why majority rule becomes a hallmark of the Romanian post-revolutionary political life. The two linked concepts explain the major cleavages that define post-revolutionary politics in Romania – the reluctance to accept the legitimacy of the political opposition and the existential threat with which national minorities are seen, as well as the fact that the human rights rhetoric becomes the main message of the initial political opposition. Both are challenges to an image that becomes entrenched as the correspondent of the order which the revolution was supposed to enact.

5. Security, consensus and nationalism

Revolution is seen in this paper as the meeting of a conceptual triad comprising security, the consensus-seeking temptation and nationalism Revolution entails the deconstruction of constitutive rules. Security (its object and its referents) are a part of the system of constitutive rules that is affected by this phenomenon. Revolution can give new meaning to security and can highlight new existential threats which need to be addressed in a different manner by the revolutionary regime. In turn, this can lead to different responses in the international arena and solicit another range of reactions from the international space in relationship to the post-revolutionary dynamics.

Security however is only one of the constitutive rules that are affected by revolution. Political or social institutions gain or lose significance by the swift and intentional attribution (or withdrawal) of functions. The limits of this process are inherent to the hierarchy of constitutive rules itself. The revolution's scope and the object of post-revolutionary dynamics are shaped by these limits and by two co-constitutive by-products of this process: nationalism and the consensus-seeking temptation.

They may be seen as an attempt to institutionalize and enact the order that the revolutionary process itself promises to deliver. The nation is seen as one of the limits of deconstruction and the collective deconstruction itself makes the post-revolutionary order more prone to a consensual, if not collectivist approach to politics. In turn, nationalism defines the existential threats the nation is facing, thereby re-orienting the course of foreign policy. Domestically, nationalism is complemented by the consensus-seeking temptation, which identifies the internal enemies and opens-up the door for the catch-all logic of political competition and majority rule.

6. Conclusions

The paper has attempted to discuss three major issues surrounding the study of revolutions On the one hand; the connection between revolution and international relations is approached by linking the revolutionary process and the concept of security. Revolution and security are seen as co-constitutive: the sudden reversal revolution entails brings changes to the referent and the object of security, just as the international dynamic influences the perception of threats to the newly gained values the revolutionary dynamic enshrines.

Secondly, I tried to show that a constructivist framework, based on the concepts of collective intentionality, hierarchic constitutive rules and agentive attribution of functions is a promising direction of study, which can contribute to the understanding of revolutions and answer the call for greater emphasis on culture and agency. Revolution is thus seen as a process of sudden collective deconstruction of norms, which is limited by the scope of the hierarchy of social institutions.

Third, appealing to the concept of consensus-seeking temptation, the paper illustrated how nationalism becomes the hallmark of post-revolutionary dynamics. The revolutionary process generates both the drive for consensus and the resurgence of nationalism, as mutually reinforcing tendencies, which are prominent in shaping the transition of post-revolutionary regimes.

Acknowledgement

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