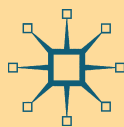




The Age of Revolutions in Global Context, c. 1760–1840

Edited by **DAVID ARMITAGE
& SANJAY SUBRAHMANYAM**



The Age of Revolutions in Global Context,
*c.*1760–1840

Other books by the editors

David Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence: A Global History*
(2007)

Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels in the Age of Discoveries,
1400–1800* (2007) (with Muzaffar Alam)

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Introduction: The Age of Revolutions, c.1760–1840 – Global Causation, Connection, and Comparison

David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam

The decades on either side of the turn of the nineteenth century have long been known as the ‘Age of Revolutions’. The term is one of the most enduring period markers known to modern historians and has often been used by other scholars invested in identifying pivotal moments in the emergence of a putatively modern world. The revolutionary elements traditionally identified as most characteristic of the period and ripest with promise for the future included the popular sovereignty, natural rights language, and secessionist independence of the American Revolution, the anti-monarchical and anti-aristocratic decapitation of the Old Regime effected in the French Revolution, and the apparent explosion of productivity and prosperity associated with the Industrial Revolution. To these key features might be added the first formal efforts to abolish the slave trade (and, later, slavery itself), the proliferation of written constitutions as novel instruments for the distribution of political power, and an upsurge of nationalisms both within Europe and amid the first stirrings of decolonization in the Americas. The very heterogeneity of these developments defied easy causal integration but that did not prevent later historians from connecting many of them into a single epochal nexus. The combinations differed but the designation varied little, whether as a singular Age of Revolution or as a plural Age of Revolutions that were complex in their forms but cumulatively reinforcing in their long-term, world-historical effects.

The term ‘Age of Revolutions’ originated during the period it describes; however, its contemporary usages do not map exactly onto the geography, the chronology, or the morphology of change later associated with it. ‘The “age of revolutions” arrived early in India’, one historian has recently noted of the 1750s and 1760s: ‘nowhere more so than in Bengal. Contemporary Britons frequently used the term

“revolutions” in describing the East India Company’s rise to military and political pre-eminence in Eastern India, and Indo-Persian sources used a similar term, *inqilab*.¹ Writing in this vein in August 1757, the East India Company commander Robert Clive told his father that ‘a revolution has been effected . . . scarcely to be paralleled in history’ after the defeat of the young nawab of Bengal, Siraj-ud-daula, at the battle of Plassey.² Fifteen years later in Patna, the Persian chronicler Ghulam Husain Khan Tabataba’i Husaini documented ‘the revolutions of Bengal and Azimabad, as far down as the year 1194 of the Hedjra [1774 CE]’ in his *Sair al-Muta’akhhirin* (‘An Overview of Modern Times’) (c.1783).³ Back in Europe, Jean-Jacques Rousseau had proclaimed in his *Émile* (1762) that ‘we are approaching the state of crisis and the century of revolutions’.⁴ By 1791, after both the American and French Revolutions, Thomas Paine thought it had finally arrived: ‘It is an age of Revolutions, in which every thing may be looked for.’⁵ And in 1815, John Adams assimilated the American Revolution, the French Revolution, and the Spanish-American revolutions into a single transformative moment: ‘The last twenty-five years of the last century, and the first fifteen years of this, may be called the age of revolutions and constitutions.’⁶

In this book, our chronological definition of the Age of Revolutions is more expansive still, and covers the roughly eighty years from the Seven Years War (1756–63) to the beginning of the Anglo-Chinese Opium War (1839–42). By starting some years before the American Revolution and ending after the climax of the wars that shattered the Iberian empires of the Atlantic world, and by framing its concerns within such global conflicts, the book aims to envisage the Age of Revolutions in terms of the connections, both long-term and long-range, experienced by contemporaries. However, it excludes earlier significant political shifts, such as those produced by ‘the Persian Napoleon’ Nadir Shah (r. 1736–47) in his expansive conquests of the 1730s and 1740s, which most historians today see not as the start of something new but as closing a pattern that harked back to the great Turkic conqueror Tamerlane in the fourteenth century; it also chooses not to look ahead to Europe in 1848, to the Taiping Rebellion of the 1850s and 1860s, or to the Great Indian Rebellion of 1857–8, which seem to us to foreshadow in important ways other momentous changes beyond those most definitive of the Age of Revolutions treated in this volume.

The Age of Revolutions as defined here ranges geographically widely to encompass almost all the period’s major regions and polities, from the North Atlantic World, South America, and the

Caribbean, via Africa and the Middle East, to South and South-east Asia and China. While the scope of the book has been designed to be extensive in space, it is quite intensive in time, in order to map the dimensions of change – and, indeed, of stability and the resistance to change – around the world more precisely than would be possible on a much broader timescale. It is also what might be called a ‘transitive’ global history: that is, a history that takes an object – in this case, the various changes subsumed under the flexible category of ‘revolution’ – and places it in global perspective. It does not attempt to be an ‘intransitive’ global history, an account of globalization or globality itself in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, though it contains much material that might contribute to a world history focused on the Age of Revolutions.

The Age of Revolutions in Global Context brings together historical specialists in most of the major areas of the world to examine the relevance and implications of models of an ‘Age of Revolutions’ or a ‘World Crisis’ to the regions they know best. On the basis of their contributions, it should be possible to begin crafting an account of the chains of causation, modes of connection, and means of comparison that might allow the decades on either side of the turn of the nineteenth century to be seen as a whole and on a global scale. The various authors have chosen different modes in which to tackle these dimensions of explanation as they apply to their own fields. Some offer integrated narratives that stress transregional and global connections. Others, in fields where the current state of research does not permit such a synthesis, emphasize instead historiographical prospects and possibilities. And, while some look outward from their particular regions to the wider world beyond them, others reverse the perspective to examine the convergence of global forces in specific regions. A fully integrated account will only be possible when all the historiographies touched by our subject have reached similar levels of development, both empirical and methodological. For the moment, a diversity of approaches is still needed. We have tried to represent that variety in the chapters, and in the accompanying guides to further reading, that follow.

To better define the book’s object, it is worth beginning by asking: what were the meanings of ‘revolution’ in the Age of Revolutions? The period was one in which traditional ideas of ‘revolution’ still coexisted with newly defined conceptions generated out of the two political upheavals that have usually been seen as key to its character, the American, in the 1770s, and the French, in the late 1780s and early 1790s. Other political transformations that were seen in terms of

revolutionary changes were in Haiti and Spanish America. However, it is evident that even the American and French Revolutions were so vastly different in character that only a capacious concept of 'revolution' could contain them both. The first was an instance of a regional rebellion of some scale led largely by a slave-owning creole elite, resulting in the secession of part of the territory of an empire while leaving most of the rest of that empire along with the imperial centre itself intact in terms of its dynastic logic and institutions of rule: as Gary Nash shows in his contribution to this volume, its revolutionary promises were imperfectly fulfilled, especially for the enslaved population of the infant United States and their abolitionist sympathizers in Europe.⁷ The French Revolution was a more thoroughgoing instance of change being effected at an imperial centre, even if that change was eventually reversed in part, first by Bonaparte, and then by a variety of monarchical regimes in the nineteenth century. The key feature that these two somewhat disparate processes had in common was the imagining and construction of a type of notionally 'acephalous', non-monarchical polity for the first time in the North Atlantic world since the experiments at the end of the English Civil War in 1649, with the formation of the short-lived English Commonwealth. To many people in about 1800, the political language of 'revolution' thus came to imply at the very least the overthrow of monarchy.

But clearly this had not always been the case, and one needs to be careful in employing a term of this complexity. As the conceptual historian Reinhart Koselleck has reminded us, with a warning against expanding the term revolution 'to include every last element on our globe', 'our concept of "revolution" cannot be defined save as a flexible general concept [*Allgemeinbegriff*], which may find a general, *a priori*, consensus everywhere but whose precise meaning is subject to considerable variations from one country to another and one political field to another'.⁸ To come to grips with what 'revolution' usually meant, it is worth turning for a moment to early modern thinkers in Western Europe before the American and French Revolutions. In 1661, the ageing French intellectual Jean Chapelain addressed a letter to his younger acquaintance, the physician and traveller François Bernier, then in the Mughal Empire ruled over by Aurangzeb. It was essential, he wrote, that the traveller should inform himself 'of the history and the revolutions of that kingdom [*l'histoire et les révolutions de ce royaume*], not merely since Tamerlane and his successors, but *ab ovo* and since Alexander'.⁹ Chapelain apparently did not mean the word 'revolution' to represent just any kind of political change. Rather

he meant the word to signify political changes accompanied by military struggles and civil wars, even if they did not call into question the monarchical institution itself. For this reason, Bernier was able to treat the struggle between the four sons of the emperor Shahjahan in the 1650s under the title *Histoire de la dernière révolution des États du Grand Mogol* (1670).¹⁰

In a similar vein, roughly a century later, the French priest Louis Bazin would write from Iran of the confusion that attended the death of Nadir Shah in a public letter with a title that spoke of ‘the revolutions that followed the death of Thamas-Kouli Khan [Nadir Shah]’ (*les révolutions qui suivirent la mort de Thamas-Kouli Khan*).¹¹ In the two instances, the usage was further facilitated by a convergence between Indo-Persian and European political terminology, for in the former too the idea that political change could be produced as a form of ‘revolution’ (*inqilab*) was common enough. It would be in this sense that both Robert Clive and Ghulam Husain’s translator, Haji Mustafa, used the term ‘revolution’ of events in Bengal in the 1760s and 1770s. Between that time and the years in which Paine wrote his celebrated missive to the Abbé Raynal on the subject of the American Revolution in 1782 and then celebrated the ‘Age of Revolutions’ in 1791, it is possible that a partial shift took place in the meaning of the term, placing it less in the sphere of cyclical movement and more within a definite teleology, or sense of historical irreversibility. But it seems that it was still the older usage that informed a text such as Jucherau de Saint-Denys’s *Révolutions de Constantinople en 1807 et 1808* (1818), regarding the tumultuous replacement of the Ottoman sultan Selim III by Mustafa IV, and then the latter’s rapid replacement by Mahmud II.¹²



With this variety of overlapping, backward-looking and forward-tending, conceptions of revolution in mind, we can see some of the limitations of the two classic surveys of the Age of Revolutions from the late twentieth century. Fifty years ago, R. R. Palmer’s monumental two-volume study *The Age of the Democratic Revolution* (1959–64) portrayed a series of assaults on aristocracy in the name of democracy from the Appalachians almost to the Urals. Yet for the American Palmer, as for his French collaborator Jacques Godechot, this cosmopolitan movement of political liberation took place within a unitary Western Civilization whose Mediterranean was the Atlantic Ocean.¹³ In this regard, his conception was recognizably a product of the Cold War. It was also congruent with the contemporaneous assessment made

in 1957 by the American modernization theorists Max Millikan and W. W. Rostow 'that we are in the midst of a great world revolution' in human aspirations, economic development, and social integration.¹⁴

The promise of the Age of the Democratic Revolution might have been similarly universal and teleological but its immediate historical effects were more tightly bounded. Palmer's study halted in 1799 on the threshold of the nineteenth century, just ahead of the Haitian Revolution of 1804 and decades before the Latin American revolutions had run their course.¹⁵ On Palmer's account, the Caribbean and South America had to wait for liberation along with much of the rest of the world: 'The eighteenth century saw the Revolution of the Western world; the twentieth century, the Revolution of the non-Western.'¹⁶ The democratic revolution was thus a gift from the North Atlantic world to other peoples who had apparently contributed nothing to its original emancipatory potential. The late eighteenth-century 'world revolution of the West', as Palmer rather oxymoronically called it, spread outward from the mostly metropolitan centres of the Atlantic world to the rest of the globe over the next century and a half. 'All revolutions since 1800, in Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Africa', Palmer concluded, 'have learned from the eighteenth-century Revolution of Western Civilization.'¹⁷

The other great synthetic survey of the period, Eric Hobsbawm's *The Age of Revolution, 1789–1848* (1962), bracketed out the American Revolution and described instead the combined effects of the French Revolution and the British Industrial Revolution as 'the twin crater of a . . . regional volcano' located in north-western Europe. As described by Hobsbawm, its initial eruption was regional but the consequences were global: 'since the world revolution spread outwards from the double crater of England and France it initially took the form of a European expansion in and conquest of the rest of the world'. This was a triumph of industrial capitalism and bourgeois liberalism whose effects would decisively shape the world's history right up to the moment at which Hobsbawm wrote. Industry had stoked empire but, as Hobsbawm argued, empire exported its own gravediggers. By the early 1960s, 'the worldwide revolt against the west', inspired in part by 'the revolutionary socialist and communist ideology born out of reaction against the dual revolution', was in full swing. For Hobsbawm, at least, what the West had taught the rest was how to roll back the European hegemony that had been the long-term legacy of the revolutionary era.¹⁸ However, as Robert Travers argues in his contribution to this volume, Hobsbawm's narrative of Europeans' global hegemony in the late eighteenth century 'appears

to have been conjured up by a number of historical sleights of hand'. It compressed into a few decades processes of political, military, and commercial insinuation into the world beyond Europe that had taken a century or more. It assimilated indigenous scholarship and political reflection to European categories rather than the specific traditions from which they sprang. And it overestimated the technological differences between Europeans and their allies and adversaries, especially in South Asia.¹⁹

In retrospect, for all their grand ambitions and real historical achievements, both Palmer's and Hobsbawm's visions of the revolutionary era now appear strikingly Eurotropic, if not quite Eurocentric, because rather narrowly focused in their conceptions of just what was revolutionary about the Age of Revolutions: the expansion of 'democracy' for Palmer, the diffusion of industry, ideology, and empire for Hobsbawm. Both gestured towards a global setting for the epochal transformations they traced, but neither attempted an integrated account of developments outside the North Atlantic world and each gave primacy to Europe as the matrix of revolution. Insofar as both the American and French Revolutions became enmeshed in the geopolitics of Franco-British imperial rivalry in the half-century after the Seven Years War, they could not but have repercussions for the Caribbean, the Middle East, and South Asia, as well as for Australasia and the Pacific basin, as Hobsbawm, at least, recognized.

In many respects, the origins of narratives like Palmer's and Hobsbawm's can be traced back to accounts of world history generated in Europe during the Age of Revolutions itself, culminating in the lectures on the subject that G. W. F. Hegel delivered at the University of Berlin between 1822 and 1830, in which he notoriously concluded that 'history is in fact out of the question' in large parts of the world, specifically Africa.²⁰ Such narratives remain tenacious but they are not ineradicable. As Joseph Miller argues in his chapter in this volume, the era experienced by northern European monarchies and their colonial extensions as an 'Age of (Political) Revolutions' was but one phase in a longer cycle of militarization and commercialization in the greater Atlantic world that becomes visible when the dynamics of African, rather than Euro-American, history are used to define and calibrate the dimensions of transformation.²¹ World history seen from Africa – rather than African history viewed from Europe, and within European categories – shows longer and more complex rhythms of transformation than reigning cataclysmic models of revolution have generally allowed. In a similar fashion, David Geggus shows in his chapter that the pace of change in the Caribbean was not synchronous

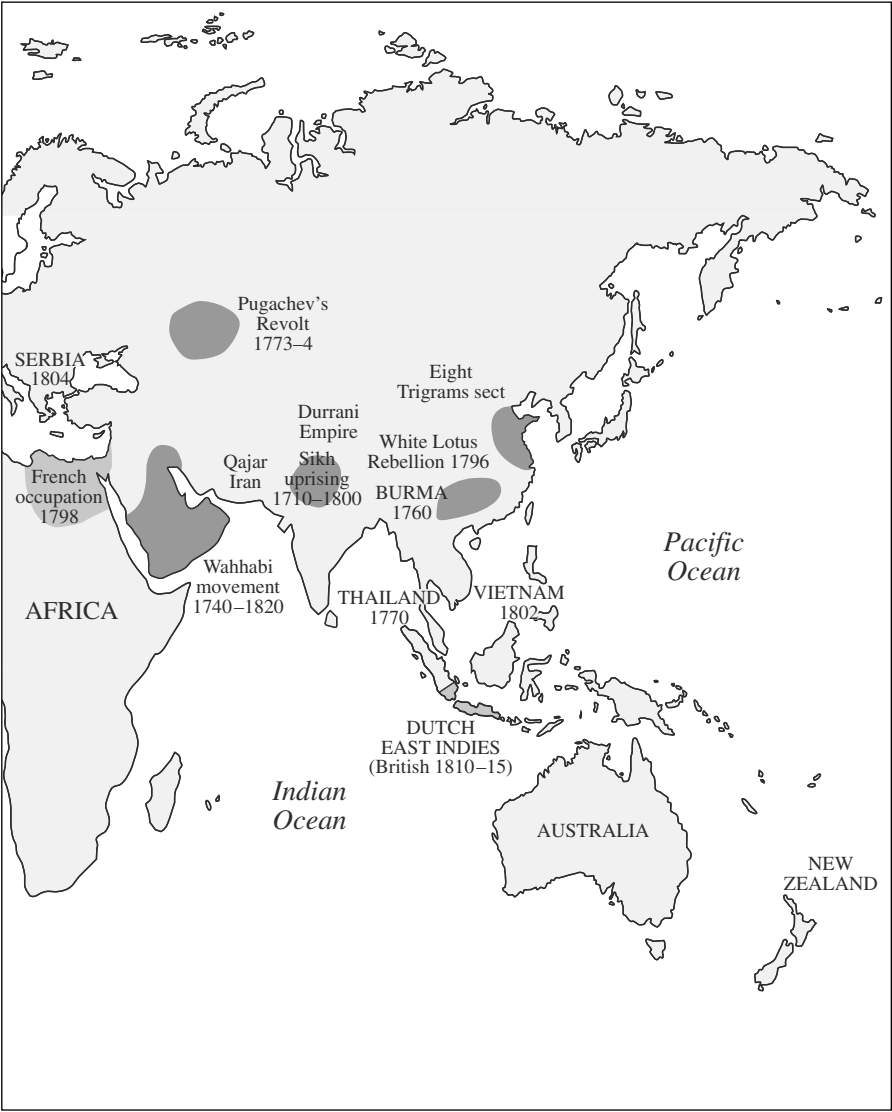
with that in Europe, North America, or Spanish and Portuguese America, and indeed that 'the changes the period witnessed [in the Caribbean] were extremely uneven and contradictory' in the effects of anticolonial revolt, slave emancipation, and definitions of freedom.²²

Only recently have historians begun to seek such novel ways to analyse the developments of this period on a global, rather than simply regional, scale. In particular, the juxtaposition of the rise of European powers to pre-eminence within Eurasia with the fiscal-military upheavals in the great agrarian empires of Asia has suggested a new picture of an era of 'convergent revolutions'. Causation as well as connection have now returned to the agenda of historians treating this era. Developments within and beyond Europe are being brought into a single frame, not to show the diffusion of change from one (usually Euro-Atlantic) region to another, but rather to show that similar developments were taking place across the world: for example, empire-making and empire-breaking; a thickening of commercial ties leading to greater interpenetration of empires and of collaborations as well as collisions among their agents; a ramping-up of pressures to extract profit from both labour and commodities independent of any supposed industrial take-off in north-western Europe; and an expansion of plantation agriculture on islands and in littoral regions from the Americas and Africa to the Indian Ocean and Asia. These various but interconnected phenomena occurred within a fundamental shift in the relations between the major European powers and the rest of the world to create a 'World Crisis' of truly global proportions. As C. A. Bayly has recently put it, 'It is the global interconnectedness of the economic and political turbulences of this era which is so striking.' John Darwin has concurred: 'the really astonishing feature of this revolutionary age was the geopolitical earthquakes that occurred not just in Eurasia but all over the world'.²³ On Bayly's account this World Crisis had fiscal, ideological, and political dimensions that together accelerated 'the growth of uniformity between societies and the growth of complexity within them' around the world. Darwin modifies this slightly by arguing that 'The Eurasian Revolution was in fact three revolutions: in geopolitics, in culture and in economics'.²⁴

Such a sweeping, nearly all-encompassing, vision is one symptom of a turn away from pointillisme among historians and a return to broad-brush painting. We say 'return' because the model for a world crisis in the revolutionary era is surely the so-called general crisis of the seventeenth century first posited more than half a century ago, also by Eric Hobsbawm.²⁵ Like Hobsbawm's later conception of an Age of Revolution, this periodization marked a stage in Europe's



Map 1 The world in the Age of Revolutions (adapted from C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914*, Oxford, 2004, pp. 84–5).



emergence into modernity. 'As transition itself has come to seem a more elusive phenomenon', one recent anatomist of the earlier debate on the general crisis has noted, 'the usefulness of crisis as an explanation for it has tended to evaporate.'²⁶ This has not discouraged historians' efforts to analyse various forms of instability – most conspicuous among them, popular revolts, warfare and subsistence crises – within a common frame. However, the relative contingency and paucity of truly worldwide connections in the seventeenth century – compared to the period under examination in this volume, at least – has made global descriptions, let alone explanations, of the general crisis implausible. Even the most expansive analyses have concluded that seventeenth-century disorders from the Spanish Monarchy to the Ming Empire were parallel rather than convergent, with climate change the only possible independent variable that could have operated on a global scale to link them.²⁷

The model of crisis has become somewhat moot for interpretations of the seventeenth century.²⁸ However, it now seems to have migrated to the late eighteenth century, a period when thickening interregional connections could render changes that were apparently simultaneous genuinely synchronous. European powers – the French, British, Spanish, and Dutch especially – had long possessed the capacity to project themselves politically, militarily, and commercially on a truly global scale. Since the opening decades of the eighteenth century, they had been doing so with increasing regularity and ferocity in a cycle of world wars that would continue almost unabated until 1815: as both Jeremy Adelman and David Geggus imply in their chapters in this volume, the military and geopolitical origins of this key aspect of the Age of Revolutions can be found in the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–14), the first of the series of world wars that cast the interactions of European powers on a global screen for more than a century.²⁹

This was in large part because the major political units of the era (and for long beyond) were not states, national or otherwise, but empires. A common theme of many of the volume's chapters is that this was 'an age of imperial revolutions'.³⁰ In the world beyond Europe, the backwash of war, revolution, and imperial reorganization collided with endogenous forces to cause parallel transformations in the Middle East, South Asia, and beyond. European and neo-European polities not only consolidated but also expanded their power through conquest, commerce, and co-optation in Northern and Southern Africa, in South and South-east Asia, and, for the first time, into the Pacific during the decades after 1760. It was also in this

period that new regions like the North Pacific were drawn irreversibly into larger circuits of commercial exchange for the first time, joining the polities and economies ranged at the fringes of the China Seas, and new commercial agents, such as the newly independent Americans, entered into global trade demanding freedom of access to commodities, entrepôts, and markets formally ring-fenced by imperial powers and their proxy companies.³¹



The conception of a ‘World Crisis’ in the period c.1760–1840 has rapidly gained the status of a testable thesis capable of standing alongside more durable conceptions of an age of Atlantic or democratic revolutions. Proponents of the new paradigm have deliberately absorbed and built upon the earlier literature on revolutions in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Yet what still remains a fundamentally synthetic account of these global upheavals has not been systematically tested against specific regional historiographies. Nor have many of the existing traditions of revolutionary historiography been placed into a supraregional, comparative, or global context.

The precise balance between a stress on connection and one on comparison is often quite hard to calibrate.³² Further, connection itself is often expressed precisely in terms of comparison, even during the revolutionary era itself. For example, one of the most significant effects of the American and more particularly the French Revolutions was to create the sentiment in elites elsewhere that they had somehow failed or fallen behind if they had not been able to emulate a properly revolutionary trajectory. Phrases such as ‘our country is sleeping’ became common, for example, in the writings of Hungarian aristocrats of the 1810s and 1820s. Even before this, and as early as 1791, the Hungarian guardsman István Batsányi wrote the following poem ‘On the Changes in France’:

O you still in the slave’s collar, that yoke
which drags you down to the grave!
And you too! Holy consecrated kings, who
– though the very earth demands your blood – still
slay your hapless subjects: turn your eyes to Paris!
Let France set out the fate of both king and shackled slave.³³

Three decades later, two Central European aristocratic travellers were to express similar sentiments of inferiority or backwardness, but this

time with respect to England. One of them wrote of how, while in England, he felt ‘like a small-town tradesman in his Sunday suit, ludicrously stiff and unable to move’, and also noted the enormous industrial vigour he found everywhere in the early 1820s, ‘with one glass factory, coal mine and ironworks next to the other [and] the entire area . . . covered with fire and smoke like the scenery of the last judgment. . . . The steam-engines are used everywhere, and they are exquisite.’³⁴ A gap was opening up, in terms of both realities and perceptions, between living standards and modes of living in England and Continental Western Europe on the one hand, and many other parts of the world on the other hand. This ‘great divergence’ – to use Kenneth Pomeranz’s well known formulation³⁵ – was not merely a contrast between India and China on the one hand and Western Europe on the other, but between the far closer worlds of Western and Eastern/Central Europe where the voices we have cited emanate.

What causal or other links were there between these divergences, great or otherwise, and the political revolutions of the period? The celebrated admission by Friedrich Engels of a striking lack of fit between France’s political trajectory and England’s economic one, leading to the invention of a sort of hybrid ideal-type in terms of political economy, may be a reasonable starting-point in relation to this issue, not least because it was clearly an inspiration behind Hobsbawm’s conception of a dual, economic-cum-political, ‘world revolution spread[ing] outward from the double crater of England and France’.³⁶ Besides, and further complicating matters, is the fact that the notion of the ‘Industrial Revolution’ is not a category that would have been comprehensible to actors at the time but a later imposition that itself remains the object of much debate among economic historians.³⁷ If such a ‘revolution’ did occur, when can it be located? If we attempt to locate it in the period after 1760, how does one account for the surprisingly low rates of growth of per capita income in England itself until about 1800? Should this process not then be seen as a regional and local, rather than a national, one, and if so, should we not uncouple it from the questions of the characterization of national and imperial political regimes?³⁸

Three distinct lines of approach can be discerned with regard to the appropriate manner in which economic and political questions might be linked causally. The first, the origins of which may be found in the work of Thomas Malthus as early as 1820, would argue that the long-term political outcomes of the Age of Revolutions on a world scale derived from economic and technological changes, and that the triumph of Britain over France and the ascendancy of the Pax

Britannica were (as Malthus put it) 'powerfully assisted by our steam-engines'.³⁹ A second view is one we may associate with the doyen of modern French economic historians, François Crouzet, who famously argued that if 'war was neither a stimulus to, nor a powerful retardative factor of British growth', the political triumph of England could not simply be attributed to her 'advanced' economic status either. If we interpret Crouzet's reasoning correctly, and choose to generalize it, it would seem to lead us in a direction where long-term economic and political outcomes in the Age of Revolutions might be seen as relatively autonomous. The economy did not drive the polity, but nor was 'opulence the reward of successful aggression'.⁴⁰ A third view can also be identified, and would subordinate both political and economic questions to the determining influence of cultural factors, in particular religion. This view has been a particular favourite with 'institutionally' inclined economic historians of the last generation, who have argued, for example, that the very different outcomes in the face of similar problems faced by the Ottomans and the French Bourbons can be understood in relation to the determining influence of culture.⁴¹

The chapters in this volume have not been forced into any single narrow framework of interpretation but tend broadly to follow the second of these three views. They are thus at some remove from a certain number of grand sociological models of revolution, of which one of the most recent is that of Jack Goldstone from the early 1990s.⁴² Goldstone tended to link early modern rebellions and revolutions (including the French Revolution) to two types of causal reasoning. One of these tied the rhythms of old regime demographic expansion to the pressure on resources and thus on the fiscal viability of states. This was an internal process, peculiar to each of the societies that were analysed by him in a comparative framing. They might thus lead to divergences but also to 'strange parallels', as another global historian has put the matter.⁴³ The second form of reasoning was more connective and conjunctural, and linked these societies together using such mechanisms as the flow of silver (and bullion more generally) and the attendant monetary crises they may have provoked. Taken together, Goldstone argued, these two forms of reasoning could be used to show why mere rebellions occurred in some societies and veritable revolutions in others, while still others managed to prevent resistance or instability from occurring. Ideology for him was a mere facilitating factor, though it could also at times act as a constraint on the production of revolution. In contrast, the chapters in this volume generally stress the field of the 'political', but not in any narrow sense: the political for them is an opening into a field of inter-

disciplinary exploration. If some of them focus on political institutions in places as far apart as China, Spanish America, and Indonesia, still others focus on the realm of political ideas, while a third group detail the actions of political agents whether within a national or in a transnational or transimperial context. This emphasis on the ‘political’ is, it seems to us, really an underlining of the contingent nature of processes in the period under consideration.⁴⁴

A global approach to the Age of Revolutions clearly demonstrates that the dimensions even of political change in the period under study were markedly heterogeneous. In some parts of the world, formal political structures came crashing down, often with much shedding of blood and significant displacement of people (as Maya Jasanoff shows in her chapter on the loyalist diaspora after the American Revolution and the flight of the émigrés from Revolutionary France);⁴⁵ while in others, the same state-actors or their direct descendants remained firmly in place. One area subject to conquest from without in this period, Egypt during Napoleon’s French invasion, experienced creolization rather than rupture in an encounter that produced ‘more irony than binaries’, as Juan Cole argues in his chapter.⁴⁶ Another locale, Java, subject first to Dutch then to British colonial rule in the period, underwent a much more wrenching transition in which Europe’s revolutionary languages (such as discourses of antifederalism) and practices proved entirely inassimilable, as Peter Carey shows in his chapter.⁴⁷

If political revolutions produced dramatic changes in regimes in many parts of Western Europe, the Mediterranean, South Asia, and a great swathe of the Atlantic world, vast areas such as Qing China, Tokugawa Japan, Tsarist Russia, and even Habsburg Central Europe were less directly affected, as, for example, Kenneth Pomeranz’s chapter on China proposes.⁴⁸ Along similar lines, a recent study of comparative experiences in East and South-east Asia in this period stresses the notion of ‘crisis’ rather than ‘revolution’, noting the existence of demographic expansion, floods, and rebellions at the time of the Qianlong and Jiaqing emperors, and ‘similar phenomena’ in Japan in the 1780s at the time of the Tenmei Famine (1782–7) and the death of Tokugawa Ieharu in 1786. Changes in maritime trade in the region, driven by piracy, commercial interloping, and the competition between European trading companies, among other factors, ensured that ‘the turn of the eighteenth into the nineteenth century was a period of global transition and changing overseas entanglements to which the regimes of China, Japan, and Java were forced to respond’.⁴⁹



Any global account of the period must account for stability as well as turbulence in the face of such challenges. The Ottoman Empire (not otherwise treated at length below) offers one striking illustration of the dynamics of resilience in the revolutionary era. On 6 April 1789, just three weeks before the so-called Réveillon Riot that shook Paris and led – in the charged words of one aristocratic contemporary writer – to a situation where ‘blood was flowing in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine in Paris, [with] five or six thousand workers, stirred up by a diabolical cabal that aimed to destroy the [Necker] ministry and prevent the Estates from meeting’, the Ottoman Sultan Selim III had ascended the throne some 1,400 miles to the south-east in Istanbul.⁵⁰ The situation he confronted was a rather delicate one, but not entirely dissimilar to that facing the ill-fated Louis XVI. A significant fiscal gap between imperial receipts and expenditures had opened up in the course of the eighteenth century, growing more acute in its second half. The same broad period saw the emergence of regional magnates, or *a‘yan*, who became indispensable intermediaries and power-brokers, and impeded any simple process of fiscal reconsolidation or centralization.⁵¹ Military pressure was mounting inexorably from the exterior, in particular from the Russia of Catherine II, specifically in the Black Sea region. In the late 1780s, Russian forces had captured a number of forts on the Dniester and a Russo-Austrian alliance seemed now to threaten not merely the Crimea and the Balkans but even the very Rumelian and Anatolian heartland of the empire itself. The Ottoman state, long considered to be the ‘Sick Man of Europe’, seemed once more to be in a state of terminal illness, not simply in military but in broadly political terms. The early years of Selim’s rule saw further military setbacks at Fokshani and Rimnik, and the loss of Belgrade.

However, we know that the worst eventually did not come to pass for the Ottomans, and that they managed to survive in some form as late as the First World War. Deft diplomatic manoeuvrings and separate treaties in 1791 and 1792 with the Habsburgs and Russians enabled them to hold on to some of the older frontiers at the Danube and Dnieper, and also to retain control over Bosnia and Serbia. In the eighteen difficult years of the Sultan’s rule, until his deposition in 1807 in favour of his cousin Mustafa IV, it was even possible for Selim III to attempt some limited reform, notably in terms of the so-called Nizam-i Cedid corps of the army, which has been termed ‘the example, the lesson, the model, and the nucleus for the military

reforms that were to follow' later in the nineteenth century.⁵² Further, in all of this, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that the Sultan himself (usually portrayed as something of a weakling if not a *roi fainéant*) was an interesting mix in terms of his disposition and tastes. Among his friends and fellow members of the Mevlevi order of Sufis was the brilliant and somewhat iconoclastic poet Sheyh Galib (1757–99), no friend of the hidebound old imperial bureaucracy and its scribal elite. Galib even wrote somewhat irreverently of the royal house, as follows.

The sagas of kings are but a painted rose
nothing more
on a fragile Chinese cup,
made for the ruler's hand
not my own.⁵³

How did the Ottomans as a dynasty and a broad political regime survive the difficult years from 1760 to 1840, which laid low so many of their contemporary dynasties and ruling dispensations? There is clearly no simple answer to this question but there are some obvious elements of a response that we know. Various ingenious arguments can no doubt be found to explain the absence of a revolution in the Ottoman Empire at the time. We would, however, stress political arguments both from the realm of institutions and from that of ideas. The principal reason for Ottoman stability, we would argue, was scale and flexibility, an advantage that France – in view of the reversal of its imperial plans in both India and the Atlantic by 1763 – simply did not possess. The Ottomans were thus able to deploy even the rather decentralized state apparatus at their disposal to deal with crises in the Balkans as well as face the challenges of the Wahhabis, who took and held the holy cities of Mecca and Medina for nearly a decade from 1805 to 1813. The eventual destruction of Ottoman power was only possible after the scale and extent of the Ottoman state had been progressively whittled down over the course of the nineteenth century and during the First World War.

A second argument stems from the realm of ideas. Ottoman political thought in the years from 1760 to 1840, like that of Qing intellectuals in the same period, refused for the most part to contemplate the idea of a kingless polity. Even in India at the time, one of the few resources that were available to reflect on this question derived from the exegetical tradition on the epic *Ramayana*, where (in the so-called *ayodhya kanda*) one finds a reflection on the disastrous consequences

of *arajaka*, or a kingless state.⁵⁴ The only viable solution, and one that was followed to the letter in Istanbul in 1807–8, was to replace a less convenient Sultan with a preferable one, while holding firm to the logic of dynasty. Even in 1840, then, at the very end of the period studied by the chapters in this volume, the central political proposition of the American and French Revolutions – namely the replacement of monarchical government with some other, ‘popular’ form – remained broadly unacceptable in the greater part of the world.

The Ottoman state, like the Mughals further east, was the object of the expansionary ambitions of a European power of the time – namely, Revolutionary France (rather than – as with the Mughals – the English East India Company). But they were also beneficiaries of the Anglo-French rivalry that cut short Bonaparte’s expedition to the eastern Mediterranean, whereas the Mughals were never able in the final analysis to play off one European power against another after 1740. As a dynasty that had ruled in a more or less coherent manner from the 1320s, the Ottomans were also far more strongly rooted in terms of cultural capital than many others that did not have the advantage of almost five centuries of a royal past. Their ‘saga of kings’ was finally made not only for the ruler’s hand but was a shared cultural resource for many of the elites in the eastern Mediterranean. In any event, to explain the fate of the Ottomans over these years, we must have recourse to at least three modes of historical reasoning, having to do with connection, comparison, and causation. If the history of the Ottomans is tightly connected with that of France, and to an extent that of imperial Britain, it is through comparison between the outcomes there as distinct from, say, Mughal India or Qing China that we may gain a firmer grasp of the multiple logics of transformation in this period.



That we can pose the problem of explanation in this way reflects the fact that the Age of Revolutions was a period in which the local and the global were rearticulated in radical ways. Neither the American Revolution nor the French Revolution was a local affair; both had global or at least pan-regional repercussions and receptions. This much the traditional historiography, such as that represented by Palmer and Hobsbawm, had always been willing to admit. But, as we have seen, the broad tendency of that historiography was inevitably diffusionist in character. This has meant that a typical sequence of causal reasoning might run as follows. The French Revolution

occurred on account of purely internal causal mechanisms within the 'hexagon' of metropolitan France, whether these were fiscal, social, or cultural. Then the story might continue that this Revolution and its aftermath next produced an aggressively expansionist and militaristic wave that led to a variety of wars on the European continent and beyond, including eventually the toppling of the Bourbon ruler of Spain, Charles IV, and his replacement in 1808 by Joseph Bonaparte. The eventual repercussions of this process would then include the rebellion of the Spanish American colonies from about 1809 and their eventual independence after the Bourbon restoration, in which the revolutionary language learnt from the American and French examples would play a crucial role.⁵⁵

Yet, as Lynn Hunt correctly comments in her contribution to this volume, the possibility that the French Revolution itself might be placed in a global context of causal movements, rather than seen as an exogenous independent variable causing changes on a global scale, has rarely been considered.⁵⁶ Indeed, insofar as historians have set the French Revolution in any international context, it has been either within the framework of a traditional diplomatic history or as an account of the Revolution's repercussions beyond France itself.⁵⁷ This is somewhat puzzling, because the available evidence of some form of global causal context for the late eighteenth-century revolutions in both America and France has been strong enough for some time. The fiscal problems of the French treasury have often been traced to the substantial debts incurred by the end of the global conflict which was the Seven Years War, and which were never entirely recouped thereafter, as interest payments mounted. The loss of substantial overseas territories and the imperial retreat in which France found itself in the years from 1763 to 1789 surely reduced the margin for manoeuvre that the Bourbon state possessed in relation to its competitor across the channel. In contrast, the problems of the House of Hanover from the mid-eighteenth century can be traced to an embarrassment of overseas riches rather than a lack thereof: one may even discern a certain carelessness in the management of the American continental colonies from the period (between 1757 and 1765) when the fiscal riches of Bengal become available with a disconcerting degree of ease.⁵⁸

While a truly connected history of these rebellions and revolutionary movements is yet to be achieved, we may legitimately ask ourselves whether the flow of causal reasoning from Europe to the overseas colonial territories might not at times be usefully reversed. Indeed, such a reversal of perspectives suggests one of the major interpretive rewards of the approach taken in this volume. Diffusionist

models of revolutionary change, like Palmer's and Hobsbawm's, occluded the various forms of connection and comparison that Travers calls the 'different forms of global early modernity', which did not tend in a single direction or exhibit parallel dynamics.⁵⁹ Those earlier models could not accommodate multiple centres of change, nor could they properly account for the fact that the era was one of counter-revolutions as well as revolutions, of local disturbances (like those in China that Pomeranz has mapped in this volume) that did not lead even to regional transformations, and of more diffuse processes of cultural and political hybridity, such as those Juan Cole and Peter Carey examine in their chapters on Egypt and Java. The very heterogeneity of change and the forms of resistance to it are fundamental features of the Age of Revolutions. That they are now visible to historians is not the least of the benefits of placing the Age of Revolutions in a global context.

This volume thus continues to stress the virtues of comparison between the fates of different polities in the Age of Revolutions, but insists that it must fruitfully be combined with forms of reasoning that stress the importance of connection.⁶⁰ There are of course at least two possible ways of conceptualizing such connected histories of revolution. A first would suggest that connections did exist and were known to past actors, but have for some reason been forgotten or laid aside. The task of the historian would then be to rediscover these lost traces. A second view would instead posit that historians might act as electricians, connecting circuits by acts of imaginative reconstitution rather than simple restitution. Here, the advantages of conceiving of these processes on a global scale become manifest rather quickly. Even if a certain number of individual cases – notably those of Russia, Japan, and mainland South-east Asia – have been set aside here for reasons of economy, it should be clear that they too could very easily be brought into the analysis, through either a primary emphasis on connection or one on comparison. The fate of the French polity obviously depended, for example, on the disastrous failure of Bonaparte's campaign in Russia, to such an extent that it is impossible to conceive of French history in the years from 1800 to 1820 independently of Russian history.⁶¹

As we move forward from the period examined in this book – the 1760s to the 1840s – to the latter half of the nineteenth century, the deeper impact of the revolutions (as well as the non-revolutions) of these years becomes plainer. However, this impact is not in terms of the production of a simple dichotomy, another great divergence as it were between societies that had undergone revolution and those that

had not. Rather, influences continued to be exchanged and transmitted between post-revolutionary societies and others that remained within the framework of agrarian and sea-borne imperial polities. Rousseau and Voltaire were read in late nineteenth-century Bengal, while ideas from America provided at least a part of the spur for the Taiping Rebellion that rocked the late Qing polity. It is in this sense that the history of the Age of Revolutions must be understood in global context, both in its own time and in terms of the mark it left in the longer term.

To conclude, a common enough perception of the Age of Revolutions is that it freed the genie of revolutionary republicanism from its imprisoning bottle, to which it could never be returned. On this view, then, an uncomplicated line can be drawn – for better or for worse – from the French Revolution of 1789 to the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, and that was not only because (as François Furet once put it) ‘the Bolsheviks always had their minds fixed on the example of the French Revolution’.⁶² In reality, however, the decades from 1840 to the early twentieth century saw very few successful revolutions, with the concrete results of even 1848 being quite limited and short-lived. Neither the Indian Rebellion of the 1850s nor the Taiping and Boxer Rebellions succeeded in their objectives, and in any event these objectives were in many instances less than revolutionary by any definition. The revolutionary tradition thus had in large measure to be reinvented for use after 1900, whether in Iran, Armenia, or Mexico, for example. To be sure, it may be argued, the revolutions and even the later anticolonial political movements of the twentieth century had the memory and traditions of the Age of Revolutions available to them as a resource, but they also had been overgrown in the intervening years by layers of myth and confusion that would prove difficult to scrape away. Among these was the pervasive view that these were essentially revolutions that had to be understood and analysed in a national (and nationalistic) framework. It is to the task of reinterpreting them that this volume contributes by viewing the Age of Revolutions as a complex, broad, interconnected, and even global phenomenon.

Sparks from the Altar of '76: International Repercussions and Reconsiderations of the American Revolution

Gary B. Nash

A half-century has passed since the first volume of R. R. Palmer's *Age of the Democratic Revolution* (1959, followed by a second in 1964) offered a stunning treatment of the geographic reach of the American Revolution. More than any other historian of his generation, Palmer initiated the move towards an Atlantic-wide consideration of political ideology and political practice in the second half of the eighteenth century. In Palmer's view the American Revolution, suffused with enlightened ideological energy, 'dethroned England and set up America as a model for those seeking a better world'. In particular, he explained how Europeans cast their eyes in wonderment upon the state constitutions cobbled together during the long war with Great Britain, seeing these expressions of fundamental law as 'the liberal ideas of the Enlightenment . . . put into practice' and 'made the actual fabric of public life among real people, in this world, now'.¹ Palmer showed how key elements of American Revolutionary ideology spread – very unevenly to be sure – across the breadth of Europe and, eventually, in paler forms, to Latin America in the first half of the nineteenth century. Among the key elements of 'the new order of the ages' were freedom of religion, popular sovereignty, the rights of man as unalienable and universal, and that all government should flow from written constitutions constructed by the people themselves.² The American Revolution, with the lofty goals of its early years for recreating government and society, set off a wave of radical, even utopian, thinking wherever the waters of the Atlantic tumbled ashore. Though he never quoted it, Thomas Paine's prediction in his