A Comparison Between Hobsbawm’s and Bayat’s Views on Non-Western Social Movements

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Abstract

Until the 1960s, literature on social movements had been limited to such movements that emerged in the West in the modern period. These movements had organizational structures and leaders and contributed to a revolution. This narrow framework contained parallelisms to the progressive theory of history and modernization theory. Researchers such as Antonio Gramsci, Michel de Certeau and James Scott, and approaches such as ‘history from below,’ subaltern studies and post-colonial theory played a key role in expanding and enriching views on social movements. Eric Hobsbawm’s studies on social movements in both pre-modern Europe and contemporary Latin America and Asef Bayat’s studies on contemporary Middle Eastern social movements have contributed to the expansion of the field by going beyond the boundaries of the social movements’ literature inspired by modernization theory. In this article, Hobsbawm’s and Bayat’s studies on social movements are discussed comparatively, though the continuity between them is emphasized. Both their philosophical and theoretical foundations as well as their contributions to the literature. Especially in Latin America and Middle East countries, where legal practices and regulations are insufficient and the existing political and bureaucratic mechanisms cannot represent the public, there are social movements that create a ‘passive revolution’ in Gramscian sense. Indeed, both Hobsbawm and Bayat studied non-Western social movements that were unorganized, leaderless, without a manifesto and non-revolutionary in the first place. Thus, by emphasizing different forms of social movement and opposition, they contributed to the critique of Eurocentric and modernist prejudices in the literature of social movements.

Keywords
Eric Hobsbawm, Asef Bayat, Non-Western Social Movements, Latin America, Middle East, Subaltern Studies

Öz


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Eric Hobsbawm, Asef Bayat, Toplumsal Hareketler, Latin Amerika, Ortadoğu, Maduniyet Çalışmaları

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**Introduction: Social Movements and Eurocentrism**

Social change has been a central subject of discussion since the foundation of sociology. Social changes were analyzed by classical sociologists who focused especially on improving foresight and leading society to projected improved conditions. Attempts have been made to understand this subject using evolutionist, dialectic materialist, conflict, and structural-functionalist approaches. One of the main empirical grounds of social change theories is the data which is collected by those who conduct research on social movements. It is important to examine the historical, political, and sociological foundations of social movements, as they frame all oppositional actions, whatever the scale of the movement and the way it spread.

As a response to the social policies and practices developed by the center, direct or indirect forms of opposition are developed by the periphery. These forms of opposition are called social movements (Della Porta and Diani 2020:29–30). The power relations between the central and peripheral actors are one of the main focuses of social scientific explanations regarding social change. Until the third quarter of 20th century, approaches to social movements, whether predicting a socialist or capitalist development, were in line with modernization theory, and parallel to a Eurocentric, linear and progressive understanding of history. This orthodox social movement reading has been challenged by the criticism of further research which refers to the differences and peculiarities of social movements in European countries experiencing late or partial modernization and in non-European countries.

Although it is impossible to assign a precise historical starting point for social movements, according to Charles Tilly, social movements developed in Europe particularly after the 1750s (Tilly 2008:17). Like Tilly, many social scientists took the preparatory phase of the French Revolution as a basis. The French Revolution is accepted as the historical event at the origin of the nation-state and capitalism. Social changes brought about by the nation-state and capitalism started to be discussed under the title of ‘modernization’ by social sciences since the 19th century. For this reason, social events and social movements have been evaluated with an emphasis on social change, mainly understood in terms of modernization. As a matter of fact, assuming the distinction between modern and post-modern, a secondary classification was made as new and old social movements after the 1960s (Özen 2015). The two schools that were influential in this field after the 1960s were (1) resource mobilization theory and (2) new social movements approach (Çetinkaya et al. 2018:33). Although Eurocentrism constituted the mainstream approach in social sciences for a long time, many social scientists criticized orientalism and modernization theory proposing new frameworks of ‘post-colonial studies’ and ‘subaltern studies’ in the post-1960 period. As a result of empirical research trying to overcome the old stereotypes used especially when evaluating non-Western social contexts, social movement evaluations have also diversified and become enriched. One of the mistakes frequently made in earlier studies which adopted modernization theory and the Western-oriented approach was to accept authoritarian regimes as immutable (Akder 2013:90). One result of this mistake has been the ignorance of the mobility of the lower classes, both in pre-modern periods and in non-Western contemporary societies (Çetinkaya et al. 2018:53). In contrast to the explanations focusing on the elites, there were also studies centered upon the lower classes and the oppressed communities, in other words, the ‘subalterns’.
Marxist Perspective on Social Movements: Gramsci and Hobsbawm

The Marxist view of social movements was also developed within the framework of a Western-oriented modernization and parallel to the idea of progress. In the second quarter of the 20th century, as a product of the discussions within Marxism, studies were carried out that focused more on the praxis of the proletariat, and in different social and historical conditions in which this praxis emerged. Contrary to the orthodox Marxist reading of social movements that was mostly formed within the framework of the progressive philosophy of history and remained limited to revolutionary workers’ movements, Antonio Gramsci developed a perspective that took revolutionary and non-revolutionary, lower and middle classes, in short, all forms of social movements into account, after studying the practical situation of 1940s Italy in which he lived. His perspective inspired both Eric Hobsbawm’s and Asef Bayat’s understanding of social movements. Taking the peculiarities of Italian society into account, which unlike other capitalist nation-states would achieve its unity and nation-building later, Gramsci ‘reinterpreted’ Marx’s ideas based on the needs of Italy. According to Gramsci, politics is a mixture of force and consent, coercion, and hegemony. Hegemony, which is characterized as a dynamic structure, means that the ruling class obtains the consent of the ruled ones, receives the support of society, and in this way gains legitimacy. While political society regulates oppression, civil society consists of social institutions that produce consent and establish hegemony. Winning in civil society means establishing hegemony (Demirovic 2012:96–99).

“For Gramsci [hegemony] involves four integrally and dialectically related ‘moments’, or ‘component parts’: first, hegemony as social and political leadership; second, hegemony as a political project; third, the realization of this hegemonic project in concrete institutions and organizational forms; and fourth, ultimately and decisively, the social and political hegemony of the workers’ movement.” (Thomas 2013:22)

At the time Gramsci produced his ideas, the existing hegemony in Italy, in which the moral leadership of the Catholic Church was influential, had to be replaced by an alternative moral principle by working class intellectuals (Turner 2006:71). Civil society, as society in general, has a dynamic and changeable structure, and the construction of hegemony is a never-ending process. Accordingly, all the opposition and differentiations that develop within civil society consisting of different groups are considered within the scope of social movement.

With the theory of hegemony, Gramsci associates economic and political change with change in ideology and social relations. Accordingly, those in power, in other words the ruling class, want to protect their own economic and political power, and avoid sharing it with the proletariat and lower classes. However, they have to socialize and democratize the economy and politics as a requirement of holding power (Sassoon 2012:137–38). According to Gramsci, the element of ‘passive revolution’, which he defined by the concepts of hegemony and civil society, was also very important in the establishment of the nation-state in Italy. The peasants accepted the new political regime and Italian unity only with a passive consent. Günersel points out that the concept of ‘passive revolution’ is used in at least two meanings in the Prison Notebooks: (1) “revolution without mass participation”, (2) “implicit advancement of a social class that isn’t allowed to advance explicitly (as the bourgeoisie did in restoration France) which Gramsci also
calls ‘revolution-restoration’” (Günersel 1988:8). Tuğal uses the Gramscian concept of ‘passive revolution’ to study the “process of absorption” by “which the dominant sectors establish willing consent (‘hegemony’) for their rule.” Accordingly,

“(…) different from classic revolutions (as in the French, Russian, and Chinese cases) where an emergent dominant class attempts to sweep away the old dominant classes and their institutions through mass mobilization, in a passive revolution popular sectors are mobilized with revolutionary discourses and strategies only to reinforce existing patterns of domination.” (Tuğal 2009:3–4)

In other words, a previously unconvinced segment of society is persuaded by passive revolution. The society doesn’t take any revolutionary action that will overthrow the political power, on the contrary, it actively supports the revolutionary changes that it will bring about. When such mass mobilizations are also included, the scope of the empirical ground and phenomena to be discussed under the title of social movements expands significantly and goes beyond the border of social movements that tend to abolish the status quo.

According to Hobsbawm, when putting forward the concept of ‘passive revolution’, Gramsci’s starting point was the idea that a revolution like the October Revolution (Bolshevik Revolution) couldn’t take place in Europe after 1920. The revolutions that were likely to take place after 1920 would have spread over time. Therefore, Gramsci specifically tried to explain that the revolution was permanent by considering the possibility that stability couldn’t be achieved in the revolution that spread over time (Hobsbawm 2014:363–67). According to Hobsbawm, with his idea of permanent revolution and his philosophy of praxis, Gramsci, unlike other Western Marxists, escaped both being imprisoned within academia and turning into a political ‘ism’ (Hobsbawm 2014:376). Hobsbawm’s reading of Gramsci is parallel with his reading of communism. Having given up on the Communist Party of Great Britain after 1956, Hobsbawm thought that the Italian Communist Party was still worth joining (Hobsbawm 2006b:468). He pointed out that the Italian Communist Party, which attracted those who were against fascism, spread its ideas twenty years after Gramsci’s death (Hobsbawm 2006a:36–48).

Why to Compare Hobsbawm and Bayat

There are many social scientists who have studied non-Western social movements in the post-colonial era. Researchers like Franz Fanon (2002, 2021), Eric Hobsbawm, James Scott (1987, 1995), Asef Bayat and Partha Chatterjee (2016) who work on the subject, have deciphered and criticized Western-oriented political philosophy behind the

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1 Antonio Gramsci (1891-1837) was not one of the highly valued intellectuals during his lifetime. His books and articles began to be published 11-12 years after his death. His works influenced determination and dissemination of Italian Communist Party’s goals and principles. He was also founder of the party. After his works were translated into other languages, his thoughts became the theoretical basis of many social movements in the colonies in the process of gaining independency – especially Latin American social movements. Gramscianism is mostly defined in two main lines. The first is the Togliatti line which is named after the Italian Communist Party leader Palmiro Togliatti, and which was influential in post-1945 Italy. The Togliatti line focuses on social movement and is parallel with Lenin’s perspective. The second is a parallel with Croce’s and Hegel’s line which focuses on ‘civil society’. This approach influenced discussion on Gramscian perspective in America and Austria (Davidson, Jehle, and Santucci 2013). Hobsbawm, as a person who met Togliatti in person and was impressed by him, followed the first line (Hobsbawm 2006b:468).
underestimation of non-Western social movements. Among those authors, Hobsbawm and Bayat are particularly interested in poverty and class-based movements or the poor. With one difference! While Hobsbawm deals with rural movements, i.e., premodern Western and modern non-Western rural class-based movements, throughout his career, Bayat focuses on the urban poor, but also on class-based movements. The main focus of Scott and Chatterjee, on the other hand, is on the cultural dimensions of those movements. Hobsbawm and Bayat both relate the politics to economic realm in the first place, while the former adopts a more macro-political perspective, and the latter a micro-political one. In other words, the main interest of both Hobsbawm and Bayat is on class movements, and especially with a focus on politics or political economy, rather than culture.

There are also other apparent similarities and connections between Hobsbawm and Bayat that prepare the ground for their comparison in this study. The ideational fundamentals of both authors are based on the theoretical framework Gramsci developed in the field of social movements. The first similarity is that both give a relatively central position to the peculiar conditions and changes of certain societies when evaluating social events and phenomena. The second is that both have done studies on non-Western regions that have experienced colonialism and liberation from colonialism. In addition, the dedication of Asef Bayat’s work titles Life as Politics “To: Eric Hobsbawm, par excellence” (Bayat 2010:V) can be read as a sign of continuity between them in the evaluation of social movements. The date range that both social scientists focus on is the post-colonial period after 1950, which is seen as a break in world history. In this period, while the former colonies gained their political independence their economic dependence decreased, and the concept of globalization was introduced in order to name this entire process of change.

Both Hobsbawm and Bayat have non-Western origins. They both migrated to a western country. Bayat who is known as an American sociologist, is originally Iranian. Hobsbawm who is known as a British historian, is originally the son of a Polish father and an Austrian mother. However, their life stories and approaches have made them critical Western social scientists. In an age where migration has become a central phenomenon, contact between Western and non-Western worlds has increased dramatically, and globalization brings diversity more than homogeneity, Western forms and Western formalism have lost their ground. In such a context, two migrant and ‘Westernized’ social scientists’ views on non-Western social movements have gained importance and relevance. Another point is that the cultural turn in social movements analysis has resulted in a purely cultural or purely political point of view. However, in the neoliberal age, the political economy perspective on class-based social movements must be recalled and this is what is represented mostly by Hobsbawm and Bayat.

Hobsbawm gained his reputation with his studies on world history and politics. Indeed, these studies were the most translated ones among his complete works. His studies on social movements, which are held relatively less in the foreground, are also substantial among all his studies. Particularly in his work focusing on social movements he is

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seen as a historian who has adopted the ‘history from below’ approach together with the representatives of the French Annales School of history and other ‘British Marxist historians’ (which also includes Hobsbawm). With the approach of ‘history from below’, the history of the silent, in other words subalterns, lower classes, laborers, slaves, and colonies has been rewritten (Uslu 2017:99-106). The ‘history from below’ approach brings permeability to the borders between the social sciences and places the agency of ordinary people into the hearth of historical-social events. For this reason, this understanding of history also includes not only historical data, but also data from sociological field studies. Hobsbawm collected data on the period in which he lived, both by compiling social and political events and by making participant observations, especially in his research in Latin America. He studied the region he wrote about, including its political-social changes after 1950, by experiencing it personally in the 1980s (Hobsbawm 2006b:297).

Similarly, Bayat presented his historical-sociological evaluations as a result of research on Middle Eastern countries conducted by himself in person. He considered the Middle East as a part of the Global South, by focusing on the social change after 1980, especially in Egypt and Iran. Asef Bayat’s childhood and youth were also spent in Egypt and Iran (Bayat 2008:11–14, 2015b:25). For this reason, some of the evidence related to everyday life in his works seems to be based on his own testimonies.

Bayat’s work offers explanations focusing on society, the agent of ordinary people and the mechanisms they operate. Especially in Western social movements literature, evaluations made using Western concepts and orientalist judgments have caused the social dynamics of Middle Eastern countries and the differentiations among individual Middle Eastern societies to be misunderstood. For this reason, Bayat presented critical assessments on Iranian and Egyptian social structures with a point of view from within, and also from below. In this way, he made significant conceptual contributions to existing poverty literature and subaltern studies and shaped his theoretical framework depending closely on his empirical field. Bayat’s work can be seen as a rejection of an orientalist conception of the Middle Eastern social movements as similar, fixed, homogeneous and coherent in each country. Nevertheless, in the face of Hobsbawm and Bayat’s Western voices of ‘subordinate’ regions - the former of Latin America and the latter of the Middle East – the question asked by Spivak, ‘Can the subaltern speak?’ could be answered negatively (Spivak 2020:113). It can be said that the question remains valid.

**Hobsbawm’s Evaluations on Social Movements**

Hobsbawm has been interested in social movements and social change since the beginning of his academic career. In his studies, he objected against modernization theory’s historical prejudices. In his first work, *Bandits*, he dealt with premodern and pre-state rebellions and social opposition based on oral culture and literary works, especially Robin Hood myths. It is possible to talk about three forms of banditry as social bandits -noble robbers, primitive resistance fighters (guerrilla units of haiduks) and terror bringing

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3 This concept means ‘cattle keeper’ and refers to the Hungarian cavalry warriors, who were hostile to the Turks, mostly residing in the border regions as an autonomous community with various agreements within
avengers (Hobsbawm 2000:20). Although he defined the period between 1789 and 1848 as the ‘Age of Revolution’ while dividing the world history into periods, he emphasized the continuity of social change and drew attention to the existence of social movements before and after this period. He adopts the ‘history from below’ approach, sees ordinary people as the main agent of historical events, and argues that the will of the masses should be put at the center of the analysis. All these theoretical positions can be associated with his long lasting and continuous interest in social movements (Akyüz 2019:16–17).

Two distinctions stand out in Hobsbawm’s assessment of social movements. Hobsbawm divides social movements into pre-political and political movements according to the criterion of era, and into peasant and labor movements according to the criterion of actor. The boundaries between them are not precise and strict, on the contrary they can easily transform into each other, regardless of their characteristics. According to Hobsbawm, the main differences between pre-political and political era movements are whether they have revolutionary or reformist goals, and their organizational capabilities or institutional skills. The pre-political movements are short-lived, formed by bandit gangs, involving a small number of people, emphasizing religiosity, and a product of economic distribution problems. Political era movements, on the other hand, continue their existence in the long run, establish an organization that includes large masses, have an ideology, and aim to change the existing system. Regarding the second distinction based on the criterion of actor, while almost all peasant movements are reformist in character, their importance comes from the point that they form the basis and initial form of the workers’ movements and other revolutionary movements (Akyüz 2019:41–42).

The ‘social bandit’, as an ideal type that Hobsbawm put forward regarding social movements, is a kind of test paper which helps to distinguish different types of social movements. Firstly, the social bandit has an altruistic and socialist character, he doesn’t care about his self-interests. Robin Hood distributes to the poor what he steals from the rich, and this makes him the most basic example of this type. Although the social bandit differs from the rest of society in terms of his actions, he shares some ethical values and common-sense understandings which are components of the collective consciousness of society. The social bandit comes into being by committing an act of rebellion after suffering an injustice in the very social environment where he belongs and has grown up. He couldn’t find any solution to his problems by applying the bureaucratic and legal instruments of the state laws that depend on the state, and as a result, he developed his own methods. Social banditry in general progressed along a reformist line and focused on the individual, local and specific problems rather than systematic ones. Therefore, social bandits didn’t carry out acts of revolutionary character. In addition, social bandits tend to maintain the current situation, and this attitude gives the social bandit a conservative character. The social bandit aims to restore broken values, vacant titles, unsuitable political decisions, and corrupted practices. One of Hobsbawm’s most striking judgments is that the most permanent and radical changes are made by conservatives over time. The public writes the history of the social bandit anonymously by poetry, song, story, etc. It is possible to watch his reflection in works of art, especially in ones based on oral culture. Therefore, social banditry narratives can be seen as an integral part of the collective memory (Akyüz 2019:43–48).
According to Hobsbawm, it is possible to come across social bandits in three ways: (1) virtuous robber (like Robin Hood), (2) primitive resistance-guerrilla, and (3) terror-spreading-revenge (Akyüz 2019:45). There may be differences depending on the social conditions between the past (pre-political era) forms of social banditry and the situations that emerged (or may occur) in the political era. This situation will lead to the development of new primitive rebellions. The guerrilla movement is important as a form of social movement which shares some characteristics of the pre-political era movements but manifests itself in the political era.

The guerrilla movement, which can be compared to the social bandit type, operates for example at a regional and local level, similar to the social bandit. It emerges in rural areas because it tries to stay out of state control and rural geographical conditions are suitable for this. Although there are also guerilla attacks targeting urban areas, its main field of action is the countryside. The guerrilla movement doesn’t have its own production system; therefore, guerrillas get their supplies thanks to their dependency relationship with local people. Guerillas don’t attack local people in return for the provision of their basic needs. Therefore, the guerrilla movement plays the role of a secondary state, and creates its own system including tax collection, legal services, infrastructure, education, and development. While the existing ruling elites have a richer profile, the guerrilla movement has much in common with the local people. This situation can be a forerunner of radical change and revolution, especially in historical moments when redistribution problems occur. Unlike the social bandit movement, in the guerrilla movement Hobsbawm sees the potential for nationalization, becoming a party, and even a state (Akyüz 2019:59–61).

As Hobsbawm states in his work the Revolutionaries, the guerrilla movement’s relations with the political authority affects its relations with the public, and vice versa. The guerrilla movement exists with the support of the local people, which mostly consists of peasants. What makes a social movement a guerrilla movement is its crowded and anonymous socio-political base, like a ‘fish in the sea’(Hobsbawm 1970:54). The guerrilla must fight for and together with the local people. Otherwise, the continuity and success of the troops won’t be possible. According to Hobsbawm, if the local people support the guerrilla, they will be adversely affected by the judicial and military forces of the legitimate political authority. In this case, the local public will give more support to the guerrilla. The armed struggle between the guerrilla and the legitimate political authority will continue as long as the guerrilla exists (Hobsbawm 1994:163–64). Hobsbawm envisages here a solidarity between subaltern sections of society. One of the most tragic examples of the conflict between the forceful use of current political authority and popular opposition is the 1949-1953 La Violencia period in Colombia (Hobsbawm 2018:87).

Guerrilla movements emerged during the Cold War and were more effective in Third World countries, especially in “post-colonial” ones with a colonial past. Among these regions, the one that most attracted Hobsbawm’s attention was Latin America, which was colonized by imperialist states, failed in capitalization, and had a rural social structure. The guerrilla movement in Latin America rose in the post-1960 period (Akyüz 2019:61). There are three factors that led to the revolt in Latin America. These are (1) seeking social justice, (2) feeling of backwardness, and (3) foreign domination. According to Hobsbawm, these three points are the main reasons behind Latin America’s opposition
to North America. The tendency towards socialism is a relatively secondary element (Hobsbawm 2018:68). As an old timer socialist, Hobsbawm⁴ realizes that while the issue of socialism is exciting, local problems in Latin America are of a depth that transcends the ideal of socialism. Indeed, Latin American socialist movements also have some nationalistic⁵ characteristics because of their local bonds and colors.

According to Hobsbawm, Latin America is a proper place to observe social changes. Political instability, economic problems, state organization that doesn’t follow democratic policies in favor of public good, with most of the population consisting of peasants, create various types of primitive rebellion in the political era. Although agriculture in Latin America is the main mode of production and the rural area covers large lands that contain most of the population, it is possible to talk about the newly formed industrial production as well as the cities. In the urban population, there is also a slum area housing people who have migrated from the countryside to the city and having precarious working conditions. This segment also has overriding population in cities. Based on these data, Hobsbawm likens Latin American social movements to those of Europe in the Middle Ages in form (Hobsbawm 2018:65) and to the French Revolution in ideological terms (Hobsbawm 2016:64). For this reason, he didn’t show any interest in guerrilla movements in Africa and the Middle East and acted with the preconception that they wouldn’t achieve successful results. Finally, as he stated in his article published in 1963, although there were popular movements leading to a kind of social change in Latin America, they remained weak in establishing a new social and political organization (Hobsbawm 2018:62).

The social opposition of the poor classes emerged in the Latin American context as a means of the search for justice. In these movements, the peasants were an effective social class, and also important in terms of forming the majority. In addition, they took action with a ‘revolutionary’ character although their profile was far from the revolutionary profile proposed by Marx. In addition to the peasants, it is possible to talk about the existence of soldiers, the urban poor, a limited number of elites (who give ideology to the movement in some cases) and students (in relation to the increase in schooling). An important feature of Latin American peasantry is that the vast majority consists of landless peasants. A similar social class also emerged after the Industrial Revolution in Europe⁶, but Latin America differed from Europe with its colonial past. The lands were shared by

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⁴ When Hobsbawm was 14-15, he started to read Marx’s books on his professors’ suggestion in Germany (Hobsbawm 2006b:80). When he was 16, he decided to be a historian following Marx’s history approach which considers history only as a science in between dichotomy of science and ideology (Hobsbawm 2006b:11). On the other hand, he defined himself as a Marxist until the end of his life and continued to be a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain until 1991, the official dissolution of the USSR (Akyüz 2019:21).

⁵ Latin American nationalism aims to achieve political and economic independence against colonizer states. The definition of a nation is made differently from European countries. The concept of nation is defined there as citizens of the country, and the unifying ideology of citizens is anti-imperialism. The elements of cultural nationalism in Latin America haven’t yet been discussed sufficiently (Hobsbawm 2018:425–41).

⁶ After the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815), English Poor Laws had an impact on society. The Captain Swing Movement was the determining factor for these laws to come into force. Male agricultural workers who participated in the war were unemployed after the war. During the war, women and children joined the agricultural labor force. Mechanization took place in agriculture. Landless peasants became seasonal workers. Agricultural labor wages fell because unemployed people increased. As a result of this hunger (as a social disaster) increased. People who united around a possibly fictional leader, defined as a captain with a military identity, committed machine-breaking actions. (Akyüz 2019:48–54).
a certain group. Landowners organized agricultural production totally according to the market opportunities provided by the colonial states. This situation resulted in a limited production not reaching the domestic needs sufficiently and therefore not satisfying the local people.

The main method in the revolutionary struggles of Third World countries after 1945 was guerrilla movements (Hobsbawm 2018:267). Although armed bandits gained popular support in Latin America, in most cases the organization quickly disintegrated and failed to maintain its stability. The first exception to this situation was Cuba, and the second was Colombia (Hobsbawm 2018:271). Among the Latin American states, Hobsbawm paid special attention to Cuba. In November 1960, Hobsbawm announced that if the United States didn’t take an armed intervention, Cuba’s regime would transition to socialism (Hobsbawm 2018:39). According to him, in Cuba, the economic slavery of colonialism was confronted with a revolutionary front (Hobsbawm 2018:41). Cuba achieved success among other national movements and came to the fore by changing the regime (Hobsbawm 2018:268). This made the guerrilla movement in Cuba an exception and an inspiration for guerrilla movements in other countries. The success of the movement led by Fidel Castro should not be considered independent of the conditions of his country. Indeed, there are serious differences between the conditions of Cuba and other Latin American countries. It was particularly after 1959, in reaction to the success in Cuba, that the USA supported the counter-guerrilla forces in other Latin American states (Hobsbawm 2018:283).

Among Latin America’s social movements, Colombia was the second country that attracted Hobsbawm’s attention after Cuba. As a region where violent incidents and murders occurred, Colombia was a place with serious political and social problems. Firstly, in the absence of a central authority in Colombia, there were incidents of violence that emerged in order to solve social problems without having a legitimate, at least a legal ground. The political party system, which came before the establishment of the state, established the constitutional oligarchy. Violent acts became inevitable when no limitation on armament was imposed. A popular movement developed under the leadership of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán and organized both the townspeople and peasants successfully. However, following the murder of Gaitán in 1948, a civil war began. The period of civil war between 1948 and 1953 was followed by with the military coup and the ‘La Violencia’ period between 1953 and 1957 was spent under a military junta. The polarization created by the people, the army and the oligarchs prevented the establishment of a stable and successful socio-political order. Two components of the oligarchy, namely the conservative party and liberal party, shared the authority and formed an alliance in order to oppress the opposition – as Hobsbawm put it, this process of oppression was an instance of ‘politicized banditry’ (Hobsbawm 2018:412). From 1950 to 1975, a kind of modern state-building process occurred together with a demographic transition where the share of urban population increased from 30% to 70%. In the 1960s, guerrilla units were established under the name FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) as a product of social tensions. Villagers formed the basis of these unions. In Colombia, the domination of the landlords allowed them to exert political and military pressure, and the guerrilla units aimed to provide justice on the side of the peasant people and to create armed forces that would suppress the military forces of the landlords (Hobsbawm
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2018:409–24). As a result, all opposition elements in Colombia were suppressed in some way. Hobsbawm’s impression about Colombian guerrilla is meaningful: “Anyone who wants to live in this country can form an armed gang of peasants. The matter begins after that” (Hobsbawm 2018:304–5).

Bayat’s Evaluations on Social Movements

In order to understand Asef Bayat’s perspective on social change and social movements, we first have to focus on how he interprets the revolution and revolutionaries. According to him, the criteria developed by Western social scientists in order to distinguish revolution from other types of social change, and revolutionaries from followers of other types of social movements are insufficient for understanding the Middle East. Bayat’s conceptualization of ‘revolution without revolutionaries’ underlines this inadequacy, and advocates that the activists of these revolutions were able to mobilize masses and to activate streets and public places, referring to common problems of the people. These actions don’t have a revolutionary goal, ideological ground, or any notion of ideal state (Bayat 2017). Bayat gave importance to the actions that took place in Tahrir Square in 2011 in this respect and stated that it set an example for other societies. These actions took place because of the commonness, rather than content, of ordinary people’s discontent. Bayat’s other important conceptual contribution to the macro-scale social change literature is the concept of ‘refo-lution’ defined as “revolution that engenders reform rather than radical change” (Bayat 2017:17–20). With this concept, he tries to represent revolutionary movements and changes that lack an ideological direction as well as the skills and notion of establishing a new state, and any aim of institutional reform. This conceptualization, which seems tautological or paradoxical at first glance, can be more easily understood when considering the fact that it occurs in societies where the political authorities suspend individual and citizenship-based rights and freedoms, and the everyday lives of ordinary people are limited by oppression.

From this point of view, Bayat focused on issues such as poverty, change in urban space, and Islamism, while examining official and unofficial strategies and tactics in the private and public spheres, in other words both in civil and un-civil society. He focused on realities outside the political leaders and their bureaucratic elite. According to him, without understanding the idiosyncratic conditions and invisible origins of the changes in the Middle East, correct explanations cannot be presented. Based on this framework, two concepts he introduces establish connection between social change and social movement literatures, and also between macro- and micro-scales of social analysis: ‘quiet encroachment of the ordinary’ and ‘street politics’.

According to Bayat, communities with a seemingly passive character that do not oppose the authority apparently may not be as inactive as one might think. Moreover, cultural explanation for this inaction referring to cultural values, laziness, etc. seems to be unjustifiable. In order to make an accurate analysis, dependency relations should be focused on. Data such as the welfare level of the society, access to resources, how much share

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7 In his book entitled Street Politics, Bayat stated that the first person to use this concept was Ayşe Öncü (written as Uncu as a mistake in Bayat’s text) at a conference where Turkish and Egyptian academics came together in Cairo in 1991, but she evaluated the concept in a different way (Bayat 2008:259). See also Ayşe Öncü’s article: (Öncü et al. 1994).
individuals get from the system as a citizen, whether civil rights meet the needs determine the action plans. The movements that Bayat calls ‘social non-movements’ are important in this respect. Most of the evaluations on the Middle East have focused on regimes that are defined as authoritarian and despotic, and reached the conclusion that agency cannot occur in these regimes. “[I]n fact the Middle East has been home to many insurrectionary episodes, nationwide revolutions, and social movements (such as Islamism), and great strides for change. Beyond these, certain distinct and unconventional forms of agency and activism have emerged in the region that do not get adequate attention, because they do not fit into our prevailing categories and conceptual imaginations.” (Bayat 2010:3). In order to highlight the connection between individuals’ networks and social action, Bayat proposes the concept of ‘passive network’ as something external and spontaneous, rather than being an integral part of a social movement. Accordingly, common threats activate passive networks in social actions, which actually is always present in social relations (Bayat 2008:47).

Particularly in quiet encroachment, individuals create a form of action while trying to solve their economic problems. Quiet encroachments occur when the law doesn’t apply equally to all people and redistribution problems recur. It aims to escape from the interventions of the state authority, to gain civil autonomy, and to meet basic needs. The main purpose of individuals who act with the basic motivation of desperation, obligation and living with dignity (Bayat 2008:41–42) is to solve their own practical problems. In this respect, this type of social action is collective in that many people resort to it, and individual in that the aims are personal. In this action, individuals try to benefit from social crises to achieve their personal goals. They also develop everyday tactics that are invisible in the public sphere. Bribery for instance is a widely used method in relations with the bureaucratic apparatus (Bayat 2008:44). Here, the state and elites are charged with the economic and political costs caused by those illegitimate economic and political relations.

One of the most common mistakes made when commenting on the Middle East is to consider that “Middle Eastern/Oriental” and “Muslim” are the same. According to Bayat, three elements are important regarding the exceptionalist perception of the Middle East. The orientalist way of thinking prepares a ground to support Western interventions. On the other hand, local regimes and authoritarian governments are constantly supported by the Westerners, and as a result, conservative and non-democratic Islamist movements emerge and spread (Bayat 2015b:32).

Islamism actually emerged against Western domination as a social movement and organization, a proposal of new order, and a theory of liberation. However, it failed to solve problems and to increase welfare, especially as seen in Iran. This failure resulted in the silent development of opposition and social activism. A consensus was reached by the subaltern segment, which corresponds to an ever-increasing large mass in society, but silently, which means without a specific organizational structure, without engaging in large-scale, resounding, public debates. According to Bayat, society kept silent about things that cannot be spoken (Wittgenstein 2013:11) but did not stop. At this point, the quiet encroachment act is unlawful, unpretentious, unconventionally organized, and aims to meet people’s basic needs such as food, shelter etc. This kind of social movement
emerges where neither non-governmental organization support nor government policies successfully meet people’s needs and solve their problems.

Bayat also pointed out the possibility that those mentioned reformist social movements gain a revolutionary character. In addition, Bayat here foresees the democratization of non-democratic regimes by being forced to do so:

“After all, change in societies’ sensibilities is a pre-condition for a sustainable democratic turn. Such change is triggered not only through information and education, but especially by the active citizenry of ordinary people (teachers, students, the young, women, workers, artists, and intellectuals) who in their everyday lives voice their demands, broadcast violations, fulfil their responsibilities, and excel in what they do. Muslim citizens cannot spearhead a democratic shift unless they master the art of presence—the skill and spirit to assert collective will in spite of all odds by circumventing constraints, utilizing what is possible, and discovering new spaces within which to make themselves heard, seen, and felt. Through their active presence in every available social space, ordinary citizens can transform their society into one that dejects authoritarian personality, surpasses its governing elites, and becomes capable of enforcing its collective sensibilities on the state and its henchmen.” (Bayat 2015a:121).

According to Bayat, at this point Islamism needs to change, and its transformation into post-Islamism becomes imperative. Post-Islamism offers the opportunity to turn “Islam and Islamic life” into a conscientious choice by removing the pressure exercised by the rulers and the laws they set up. In this way, society- and citizenship-based solutions become possible. The post-Islamic movement demands regulation of citizenship rights related to both private and public spheres. Added to this, new social movements such as the feminist or youth movements fall under the “non-Islamic” social movements category.

The Comparison Between Hobsbawm’s and Bayat’s Approaches

There are similarities between the post-1945 social movements in the Middle East which Bayat deals with and the social movements of the pre-political period which Hobsbawm identified on the empirical ground of feudal Western Europe. Similarities between these two types of social movements are that they are organized at a regional scale and are the product of gangs (in other words, based on primary relationships such as family-kinship relations). In addition, they have short-term daily goals, they cannot produce ideology, and they do not have long-term plans and programs that aim to establish a new order at the end. Further similarities can be found between the emergence and organization of ‘social bandits’ in Hobsbawm, and the ‘quiet encroachment’ in Bayat. Both emerge in the authority gap and take advantage of it.

The most striking difference between the social movements that Bayat and Hobsbawm deal with is related to the actors of the movements. While women, the unemployed (such as those who have always been unemployed, those who became unemployed in one day after the Islamic Revolution, street vendors, refugees etc.), the new social classes, the precariat, the youth, migrants from rural areas to cities, and international immigrants are included in Bayat’s social movement analysis, Hobsbawm focuses on a group of mostly male villagers under the concept of social bandit. As a separate group, he only assigns a subordinate role to the settled villagers who support them. Another difference is their origin of intellectual inspiration. While it is mostly literary works which shape
Hobsbawm’s point of view, Bayat’s vision of social movements is determined by recent socio-political events and phenomena. For this reason, Hobsbawm is vaguer, and Bayat is more specific in terms of the content and boundaries of the concepts. This judgment is valid not only for Hobsbawm’s subcategorization of social bandits, but also for his studies on Latin American guerrillas.

In both Bayat and Hobsbawm, the everyday life and its inherent problems are the basis of the political and social movements analysis. However, Bayat produced more works on the problems encountered in everyday life, daily practices, and actions. As Michel de Certeau did, he aimed to reveal the social conditions by dealing with strategy and tactics in various narratives of events. Certeau’s concept of ‘everyday tactics’ and Bayat’s concepts of ‘quiet encroachment of the ordinary’ and ‘art of presence’ are similar to each other. Bayat focuses more on the capillaries of social life, on the relationships and interactions in everyday life, in other words, on the microscale, as opposed to Hobsbawm’s more macro-politics-oriented view. In this respect, Bayat more resembles E. P. Thompson, who is among the leading British Marxist historians together with Hobsbawm. Thompson, in his masterpiece The Making of the English Working Class, presented a historical analysis of the dynamic character of the class concept because it included the subject and consciousness (Kaye 2009:227–30). In his focus on microanalysis of social relations, Bayat resembles Thompson as well as James C. Scott, whom he occasionally refers to in his own work. Both Bayat and Scott agree that the primary goal in the actions of the urban poor in the Third World countries is survival. Bayat locates Scott in the ‘Brechtian line’ which can be seen parallel to Gramsci. On the other hand, Bayat thinks that Scott is insufficient in explaining the action dynamics of the urban poor, considering them only in a defensive position (Bayat 2006:128). According to Bayat, the long-term goal of the urban poor is to improve their own lives with the privileges they receive from the state. Therefore, quiet encroachers aren’t only defensive, but they also try to gain privileges with covert attacks (Bayat 2008:33). At this point, Bayat comes closer to Gramscian concept of ‘passive revolution’ and resembles Hobsbawm in this respect.

The presence/absence and quality of the political consciousness behind the social movements stand out as important axes of differentiation. It is possible to talk about social consciousness in the primitive social movements that Hobsbawm deals with. The upper

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8 Michel de Certeau, in his work The Practice of Everyday Life, examined the implicit relations between the ruling and the dominated classes. According to his conceptualization, ‘strategies’ are the distribution of power balances within a given area. On the other hand, ‘tactics’ are the piecemeal infiltration of a social actor into the domain of his other. This infiltration movement isn’t aimed at total interference. While strategies are dependent on space, tactics are dependent on time (Certeau 2009:54).

9 Bertold Brecht was an artist who witnessed Germany under Hitler, World War II, and the emergence of Western Marxism. In addition to his literary works, he was an intellectual who contributed to social science with his writings on socialism. Contrary to the dominance of the bourgeoisie in the fields of education, art, and history, he argued that the proletariat should interact more with these fields, develop criticism, and produce. According to Brecht, the proletariat, who enjoys art with its historical consciousness and the ability to look critically, can adopt and develop the legacy of the bourgeoisie in these areas (Brecht 1977:238–39). In his epic theater works -although it is a more direct didactic language- he gives the reader an active role intellectually and forces him to criticize by alienating him from the narrative and making him think about the characters and their behaviors. It is possible to read Brecht, who supports peaceful ways, as a passive revolutionary advocate in the Gramscian sense. A more detailed evaluation of Hobsbawm’s relationship with Brecht (Hobsbawm 2006b:80, 2013:1–3) as a person whom Hobsbawm read, was influenced by, and admired since his teenage years in Berlin, goes beyond the limits of this article.
strata serve as a kind of common enemy that unites organizations among the lower social strata. They come together on the basis of hostility as a collective emotion and political belief. On the other hand, Bayat’s ‘quiet encroachers’ have a lower, if not nonexistent, level of political awareness. Indeed, as the level of consciousness increases in actions that focus on the self-interest of individuals with instant decisions, they would lose their qualification of being ‘quiet encroachment’ (Bayat 2008:34–35). Bayat regards Scott as the main representative of the ‘resistance paradigm’ and criticizes him for attributing an excessive political significance to the actions of the poor, namely a resistance intention (Bayat 2006:39 vd.). Bayat’s ‘quiet encroachment’ actions are conscious of the poor and therefore have no political strategies. In this respect, they differ from Gramsci’s passive revolution. Of course, quiet encroachment may evolve into a revolutionary structure that will result in the weakening or destruction of legitimate political order, but this isn’t its primary goal. On the contrary, two goals of quiet encroachment actions are to ensure the redistribution of social goods, and to gain both cultural and political autonomy from the regulations, institutions and discipline imposed by the state (Bayat 2008:38).

Absence or availability of a leadership constitutes another criterium for comparison between social movements. Hobsbawm’s concept of the ‘social bandit’ refers to a personified character—often a charismatic leader—whether he is a real person or not. On the other hand, there is no fictional or real leader in Bayat’s analysis of social movements in the Middle East. He speaks of a social movement closer to a timeless, anonymous passive revolution in Gramscian terms. In this respect, he states that the changes occur in a reformist way by putting pressure on politics and law, not through a total revolution that changes the order. In Hobsbawm’s approach, the point whether social movements are reformist or revolutionary gains importance when dealing with the issue of lack of leadership. Accordingly, when it comes to revolutionary social movements, lack of leadership is a weakness, in other words, a leader is a must for revolutionary movements. Primitive social movements without leaders can only bring about reform-like changes, rather than creating radical ones.

However, some problems may also occur in social movements as a result of having a leader. Hobsbawm points out the negative effects of the capture or murder of the leader of a social bandit gang. According to Hobsbawm, capturing or killing the leader is an effort to hide the inadequacy of the law, in a context where existing laws are insufficient to provide justice (Hobsbawm 1973:14). Therefore, the capture or murder of the present leader may weaken the movement against authority. In this case, the movement may be incapable of appointing a new leader and maintaining continuity in the face of the capture or killing of the current leader. This point resembles Scott’s emphasis on the importance of anonymity in certain kinds of social movements (1995). In such primitive social movements, Hobsbawm focuses on the possibility of transforming the movement into a modern social movement with a revolutionary character through various changes. Banditry, a category Hobsbawm uses to explain primitive social movements, is not a new mode of production and administration, but a form of opposition. For this reason, the bandit must stop banditry to fully represent the people, which is the paradox of banditry (Hobsbawm 1959:27).

Bayat, on the other hand, focused on the transformative and reformist character of primitive social movements as well as the advantages of this character. The lack of
leadership indicates that the movement becomes anonymous and takes a form that can’t be captured in time and space. Here, the resemblance to Scott is more apparent. Indeed, while Hobsbawm focused on the differences between the social movements of the pre-political period and the political period, Bayat focused on the points where the social movements in the political period differ from each other. There are several drawbacks to making a correlation between the practical success of the social opposition and the presence of a leader. As Scott stated, the state of lack of leadership isn’t a weakness in itself; on the contrary, it can help the movement acquire a more indestructible and tactical form (Scott 1995:208–9).

According to Hobsbawm, among the examples of Latin American social movements, the leading one is the guerrilla, which is mainly a rural social movement. He argues that guerilla movements may also take place in the city as a rare phenomenon which should then be called ‘urban guerilla’ (Hobsbawm 1970:58, 2018:292). However, riots and rebellions are the main social movement forms in the city context. Bayat’s approach to the subject is to point to the action structures that connect these two dimensions to each other. According to him, one of the most basic features of social movements is that they are illegal mass movements which rise in places where the political authorities have the right to intervene but cannot control the masses. In addition, the social movements that Bayat deals with have been the movements created by the new urban population, originally peasants, in relation to the changes experienced under the influence of rapid and uncontrolled urbanization. Whenever we talk about guerrilla, we are emphasizing an armed organization. Therefore, the social movements that Bayat deals with are not guerrilla movements per se, however, in terms of the ways and methods they use, for example while escaping from the authority, they seem to agree, reconcile, and follow a guerrilla-like line, and develop alternative opposition styles.

Hobsbawm describes the two ends of social movements based on Cuba as a success story, and Colombia as a disappointment. Bayat’s work centers upon the examples of Iran and Egypt, which can be located somewhere in between. Indeed, according to Bayat, the revolutionary processes in Egypt and Iran haven’t been completed yet. They still continue. Therefore, there is still the possibility and opportunity to establish a future with the public will at the forefront. As a matter of fact, Bayat predicts that the political Islamist movement should evolve into democratization, and that the opposite situation is unsustainable.

Conclusion

Social movement is one of the main issues of sociology. The first focus of social movement research is on solving the problems and taking control of crises which have emerged as a result of industrialization and urbanization in modern societies. With the challenges in international relations and social theory, the norms and findings of this approach to social movements have been opened to discussion. In this discussion, the concept of ‘subaltern’ developed by Antonio Gramsci was an important contribution which enabled the development of different perspectives and particularly influenced the way of thinking about Third World countries. With the post-colonial process after 1950, the peoples of the former colonies became citizens of newly emerged nation states. While
former research on the Third World was mainly based on culture-oriented generalizations and prejudices, in the new period, rural and urban social movements in the non-Western context have been subject to research free from bias. The diversity of social opposition forms has been added to the literature with the ‘history from below’ approach and social science studies that focus on the actor in the structure-agency dichotomy (and on the individual in the state-individual duality).

Both Eric Hobsbawm and Asef Bayat are social scientists focusing on the subaltern populations and social movements in Third World countries. They both produce knowledge about non-Western regions or periphery countries even if their research is institutionally conducted within the academies of the core countries. Their works are widely translated into different non-Western languages, including Turkish, Arabic, and Persian, and contribute to the dissemination of knowledge on non-Western social movements throughout the world. In this study, two social scientists are compared with special focus on the continuities and discontinuities between their approaches to social movements. The study concentrates especially on the theoretical frameworks and data production processes of two social scientists, rather than on an assessment of the social movements that took place in the periphery. Such an analytical comparison can be seen as contribution to a more comprehensive future classification of social movements.

Both Hobsbawm and Bayat focus on resistance mechanisms that develop not only as obvious political oppositions and conflicts with authority, but also less apparent movements embedded in the social sphere. These mechanisms, which develop in the social life, in the capillaries of society, are effective in reshaping not only the social field, but also the political field. Communities that seem apolitical and in harmony with the authorities at first glance create their own common sense and struggle mechanisms and exhibit invisible resistances against the official authorities. These forms of opposition to oppression emerge when laws are suspended and/or democratic laws are not enforced. Therefore, the social movements created by the subalterns create an alternative way of establishing order. The relations between the subordinates and authorities are relations of dependency, and these relations are also effective in determining the targets, forms, and repertoires of collective action. It is possible to say that these are groups which avoid using classical methods and techniques against the authorities and exert influence through secondary means. In most cases, actions don’t aim for lasting change and their vision is narrow. This situation is a product of mental structures built in dependency relations. Maybe, in fact, the social opposition isn’t clearly visible and doesn’t acquire an overtly political character, but contrary to the common premise, it doesn’t mean that there is no opposition to or rejection of the authorities. The sharp and often arbitrary rhetoric and practices of the authorities are stretched in the social movements created by the subalterns, which have the quality of ‘passive revolution’.

The studies of Hobsbawm and Bayat have expanded the boundaries of the subject of social movements by drawing attention to different oppositional social attitudes, behaviors, and forms of organization. It was seen controversial whether those collective actions could be considered as ‘social movements’ or not, especially when viewed in terms of norms and criteria articulated in the previous literature. Based on the perspectives of these two social scientists, it is possible to say that social movements in the broader
sense have a deep social impact, even if they do not explicitly target a radical social transformation. In addition, it is also possible for social movements that do not have revolutionary goals to acquire a revolutionary character in time.

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