

THEORIES OF REVOLUTION: THE GENERATIONAL DEADLOCK

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Abstract

The paper attempts to highlight the main characteristics and the main flaws of the most important classification of theories of revolution, the generational approach. The first half aims to discuss and present the main tenets of the most important taxonomy of theories of revolution, as well as the similar attempts made by several scholars to build alternative classifications of theories of revolution. The second part of the paper attempts to show the limits of the aforementioned perspective and the importance of looking for alternative approaches to the study of revolutions. The paper considers that the generational perspective remains impermissibly flexible and elusive, ignoring the main paradigmatic debates within the field of study and maintaining a strong bias in favor of the clearest category, that of structural theories.

Key words: *revolution, theories of revolution, structural theories of revolution, generational classification.*

Introduction

The most important element that requires discussion is the relevance of classifications in the study of revolutions. I believe classifications are important for several reasons. On the one hand, they are important in mapping out the theoretical space pertaining to revolutions. On the other hand, the limits of classifications can become very well limits of theories of revolution. Moreover, classifications are relevant not only for the specific conceptual content of the theories themselves, but also in regard to the major paradigms of social science that influence the particular field, as well as for the very important relationship between the studied phenomenon and the theoretical framework encompassing it. Last, but not least, classifications are important in order to define the major theoretical debates that shape the study of revolutions.

The generational classification can be considered probably the most important effort dedicated to charting out the theoretical endeavors regarding revolutions¹. The generational perspective, developed by Jack Goldstone and reaffirmed successively by John Foran divides the space of theories of revolutions into three clear generations of theories and a post-third generational perspective. The most important aspect of the generational perspective is that the classification is not purely chronological. Of course, the concept of a generation of theories is supposed not only to illustrate the apparition of successive perspectives on the revolutionary phenomenon, but also the important paradigmatic debates which are supposed to have taken place and to have influenced the study of revolutions. Moreover, the time-frame that encapsulates theories of revolution makes it easier to accommodate the influence that new events have on theoretical models and endeavors, thus showing for example how Third-World dynamics shaped and influenced theories of revolution which up to that point had been dedicated mostly to successful major social revolutions.

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¹For an outline of the generational perspective on theories of revolution see Jack A. Goldstone, "The Comparative and Historical Study of Revolutions", *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 8 (1982), as well as his more developed perspective, "The Comparative and Historical Study of Revolutions" in *Revolutions. Theoretical, comparative and Historical Studies*, (Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2008), Jack. A. Goldstone, "Toward a Fourth Generation of Revolutionary Theory", *Annual Review of Political Science*, 4 (2001), and John Foran, "Theories of Revolution Revisited. Toward a Fourth Generation?", *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 11, 1 (Mar. 1993).

Taxonomies of theories of revolution

The generational classification is by no means the only attempt to order a theoretical subfield of study that at times proves as elusive as the studied phenomenon itself, nor does it represent the first attempt to draw a chronological distinction between the different theories. Chalmers Johnson's draws a distinction between four categories of theories of revolution: theories that privilege the actor's role, structural theories, conjunctural theories and political process theories². Another important attempt of distinguishing between different perspectives on revolution is Eisenstadt's chronological classification of „naturalist” and „structural” theories³. Tilly opts for a paradigmatic presentation of the numerous theories of revolution that focuses on ideal-types, thus establishing five inter-related categories that characterize theories of revolution: the Marxist, Millian, Durkheimian, and Weberian perspectives, which are joined by the revised Marxist theoretical group⁴ and his own anti-Durkheimian, Marxist, Weber-indulgent and Mill-friendly model⁵. Roderick Aya divides the spectrum of theories of revolution in three large categories – theories focusing on the intentions of the revolutionists themselves, theories that take into account the results of the revolutionary process and theories that focus on the concept of multiple sovereignty⁶.

A different approach is that taken by Timothy Wickham-Crowley. Although his undertaking seeks to map out the distinction between structural theories, his insistence on discussing the works of Eric Selbin, Lynn Hunt or Forrest Colburn, whose perspective is nevertheless somewhat critical towards the capacity of structural studies of understanding revolution itself makes his classification more likely a „map” of recent attempts of studying revolution. The same conclusion can be reached if we take into account the fact that Wickham-Crowley focuses on aspects that are deliberately ignored by structural theorists, such as the problem of agency and the role of cultural factors⁷.

Wickham-Crowley describes two epistemic axes which connect the social dynamics to cultural ones and contingency to structure, which result in four ideal-types: structure-social plan, structure-cultural plan, contingency-cultural plan and contingency-social plan⁸.

We see therefore that the attempt to offer a classification of various theories of revolution is not the privilege of the generational perspective. As mentioned, it offers nevertheless some impressive advantages on its competitors – it manages to draw a time-line that links theories of revolutions and revolutions; it manages to sum-up what are the great paradigmatic shifts and debates; it manages to illustrate a convincing image of the evolution of our accounting and understanding of the revolutionary phenomenon.

The generational classification focuses on the theoretical debates on the causes, origins and dynamics of revolutions by focusing mostly on three “generations” of theories and of theorists. There is a somewhat implicit dialectical perspective present in the generational approach: each new generation criticizes the main tenets of the one preceding it, pushing the image and the study of the revolution towards a new direction.

²Chalmers Johnson, *Revolutionary Change* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982), 169-170.

³S. N. Eisenstadt, *The Revolution and the Transformation of Societies. A Comparative Study of Civilization* (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 6.

⁴For works representative of this current see Eric R. Wolf, *Peasants* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1966) or Barrington Moore Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy. Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

⁵Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1978), 44-46.

⁶Roderick Aya, *Rethinking Revolution and Collective Violence. Studies on Concept, Theory and Method* (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 1990), 14.

⁷Timothy Wickham-Crowley, „Teorii structurale ale revoluției” in John Foran (coord.), *Teoretizarea revoluțiilor*, coord., (Iași: Polirom, 2004), 53-55.

⁸Wickham-Crowley, „Teorii structurale ale revoluției”, 54.

The first generation of theories of revolution is „the natural history of revolution”⁹. For Goldstone, and for Foran too¹⁰, „the natural historians” of revolution are mainly concerned with describing the patterns of revolutionary events, starting from a small series of extraordinary revolutionary cases. Most commonly, the English Revolution of 1640, the American, French or Russian Revolution represent the empirical bases from which largely descriptive accounts of the phenomenon are drawn. The first generation of theorists thus manages to identify a series of common characteristics of revolution, which end-up being seen, according to Goldstone, as empiric generalizations concerning the phenomenon itself¹¹. Intellectuals „desert” the regime prior to its immediate downfall, while it tries to make-up for its short-falls with a program of all-encompassing reforms. The fall of the regime is most of the times precipitated by its perceived inability to deal with the military, economic or political challenges, and not by the actions of the opposition *per se*. The opposition manages to take over the state, and a succession of political groups contest for the leadership of the new government. The moderate factions are the immediate leaders, but they are soon replaced by radicals who go on to enact a program of wide social and political transformation for the society. The scope of the transformation of the society leads to a conflict between moderates and revolutionary radicals, which normally ends up with the ascent to power of a military figure, that accommodates the transition of the revolution towards another moderate phase, during which the new regime acts with pragmatism¹².

The criticism leveled against the first generation of theorists and theories¹³ is that there is, at least according to Foran and to Goldstone, an obvious reluctance of looking for the causes of the revolutionary phenomenon. Moreover, the „natural historians” are content with identifying the empiric occurrence of the intellectual contestation of the regime and not with its genesis¹⁴. John Foran boldly points out that the first generation theorists are rather more preoccupied with “describing” revolutions instead of “explaining” them¹⁵.

The first generation is followed according to Goldstone by the general theories of revolution¹⁶. In opposition with the first generation, the second category remains extremely fluid both for Goldstone and for Foran. At times it seems more a residual category that needs to separate chronologically the first generation from the “structuralist” wave. The authors of the taxonomy themselves go at great lengths to ensure the paradigmatic coherence that the classification should entail: thus, initially, the “general theories of revolution” Goldstone adheres to become for the same author “general theories of political violence”¹⁷. Moreover, the authors belonging to this category are a matter of dispute. For example, Tilly is positioned differently by the two authors: Goldstone sees him as a representative of the second generation, whereas Foran sees him belonging amidst the structuralists¹⁸.

Within the second generation of theories, in order to draw a clearer outline, Goldstone distinguishes between the psychological approach to the study of revolutions and the systemic

⁹ Goldstone, „The Comparative and Historical Study of Revolutions”, 189.

¹⁰ John Foran, *Taking Power. On the Origins of Third World Revolutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 8-9.

¹¹ Goldstone, „The Comparative and Historical Study of Revolutions” (1982), 189.

¹² Goldstone, „The Comparative and Historical Study of Revolutions” (1982), 189-192.

¹³ For an outline of the most representative works encompassed by the tradition of „the natural history of revolution” see Crane Brinton’s *Anatomy of Revolution*, (Vintage Edition, New York: Random House), 1968 or Lyford P. Edwards’ *The Natural History of Revolution*, (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1973).

¹⁴ Goldstone, „The Comparative and Historical Study of Revolutions” (1982), 192.

¹⁵ Foran, *Taking Power. On the Origins of Third World Revolutions*, 9.

¹⁶ Goldstone, „The Comparative and Historical Study of Revolutions” (1982), 192.

¹⁷ Goldstone, „The Comparative and Historical Study of Revolutions” în *Revolutions. Theoretical, Comparative and Historical Studies*, ed. Jack A. Goldstone, 5 (Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2008), 193.

¹⁸ Foran, „Theories of Revolution Revisited: Toward a Fourth Generation?”, 2.

approach. The first¹⁹ is built around the hypothesis that revolution is a particular response/reaction to increasing misery or oppression. The systemic approach, best exemplified by the works of Smelser or Johnson insists that the study of revolutions as an ultimate form of social change must start from the study of various forms of disequilibria within the social system²⁰.

Adding to the vagueness of the second generation is the form that the second sub-category takes later in Goldstone's view. Not only does he name the generation, but he also makes room in it for Huntington's thesis on the effects on uneven modernization, as a synthesis of the two previous sub-categories, the psychology inspired theories and the systemic branch of the generation²¹.

In spite of the great variety or flexibility that the second generation shows, the proponents of the generational classification try to sum-up the main characteristics of the theories comprised within this group. Nevertheless, the distinction is affirmed rather at a methodological level. In comparison with the "natural history" theorists, second generation scholars put an emphasis on increasing the number of cases they study. As comparison becomes the preferred method, second generation theorists believe that increasing the empirical sphere is warranted in order to avoid the vulnerabilities first generation theories had to deal with.

Adding to the specificity of second generation theories, Foran considers that the concepts grouped within this category can be best seen as what Rod Aya named "volcanic" theories of revolution. Revolutions are almost inevitably the result of accumulating social or emotional pressure. Theories falling in this group can be subdivided for Foran between Parsons inspired theories (such as the works of Smelser or Johnson) and psychological approaches (best summed up by the works of Gurr or Davies, focusing on relative deprivation²²).

Although Foran tries to make the category more coherent, by trying to establish the paradigmatic foundations of second-generation theories, he is much more successful in pinpointing the problems these theories raise. Moreover, it is important to note that Foran's emphasis on the criticisms brought against second-generation theories is proved by his reluctance to find a name for the second generation (thus eschewing the problems that Goldstone had to face).

For Foran, as for Aya, the problems facing second generation theories are numerous. Neither relative deprivation, nor sub-systemic disequilibria are easy to observe or measure. Moreover, the outline of the explanatory model remains tautological and, at the same time, prone to post-factum false identifications²³. Second generation theories are tautological because they fail to move beyond the deprivation-violence hypothesis and self-referential because of the tendency to identify disequilibria after the revolutionary events have taken place. Last, but not least, Foran emphasizes that in spite of the second generation theorists' adherence to the imperative of subjecting a larger number of empiric cases to their comparative framework, second generation theories are unable to explain the major characteristic of revolutions themselves: their rare occurrence and their totally extraordinary nature.

If the second generation of theories raises numerous questions and problems for both Foran and Goldstone, the third generation seems to offer a rather more homogenous and coherent corpus of theories and concepts. The major characteristic that links theories placed under the generous umbrella of "structuralism" is their attempt to study, for the first time, in a systematic manner the causes of the revolutionary phenomenon²⁴. Most of the times, revolutions are caused by the particular

¹⁹ For works representative for this sub-category see James C. Davies, "Toward a Theory of Revolution", in *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 27, No. 1, (1962) and Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970).

²⁰ Goldstone, "The Comparative and Historical Study of Revolutions." (1982), 192-194.

²¹ Goldstone, "The Comparative and Historical Study of Revolutions" (2008), 5.

²² Foran, *Taking Power. On the Origins of Third World Revolutions*, 9.

²³ Foran, "Theories of Revolution Revisited: Toward a Fourth Generation?", 2.

²⁴ For relevant works that fall into this category see Theda Skocpol, "France, Russia, China: A Structural Analysis of Social Revolutions" in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 18, No. 2, (Apr., 1976); Theda

outline of the conflicts between states and elite groups and by structurally determined weaknesses of the states themselves.

It is important to note that most theorists falling within this category affirm the autonomy of the state as an institution; distinct from the interests of elites and dominant classes, and the existence of a competitive system of states exerts pressure on the states themselves. Within this competitive system, the states unable to cope with the challenges the system of states itself generates are subject to political crises that set-up successful revolutions²⁵.

Besides the preoccupation with the causes of the revolutionary phenomenon, another direction of the structural theories of revolution consists of identifying the types of states that are prone to be affected by the phenomenon. Moreover, somewhat reverting to the scope of the first generation of theories, structural theorists also try to build-up a theory that explains the results of the revolutionary process. This development is entwined with the emphasis put on the identifying the causes of the revolutionary phenomenon²⁶.

It is true that there is a clear difference between Goldstone's and Foran's approach. Goldstone insists on the characteristics of the generation itself and on the main issues studied by structuralist scholars – the complex relationship between the states and the elites, the causes of rural or urban revolutionary events. Foran prefers to identify the precursors of the structuralist generation, thus discussing the contributions of Eric Wolf or Barrington Moore, while trying to account for Theda Skocpol's study's central position within the third generation of theories of revolution²⁷. While Goldstone focuses on identifying the main tenets of the structuralist approach, Foran is more interested on identifying the scholars that belong to it.

The generational perspective concludes with the fourth generation of theories of revolution. Its somewhat adjacent character is shown not only by the lack of a proper label, but also by its purely situational position within the efforts of Goldstone and Foran. The fourth generation, while supposing to lead forwards the efforts into studying revolutions, is defined more by the criticism brought inevitably to third-generation approaches and by the inescapability of chronology. In a dialectic manner, the fourth generation develops and refines the hypotheses and the methods of the structuralist wave, aware both of their shortcomings and of their potential. Thus, Foran underlines the fourth generation's preference for multi/causal models that strive to integrate factors as diverse as economy, politics and culture, while paying attention to the importance of discourse or ideology²⁸.

As far as Foran is concerned, the main characteristics of the post-structuralist generation lie with questioning the issue of agency and exploring the role culture plays in revolutionary dynamics. For Goldstone, the task of the new generation of theories and of theorists is to question Skocpol's main assumptions, such as the stability of the regimes²⁹. Goldstone also tries to sum up the new elements that are factored in by the multi-causal approaches of the fourth generations. Most prominent among these are concepts such as dependent development, demographic pressures, and cultures of rebellion or loss of nationalist legitimacy³⁰.

Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions. A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), Theda Skocpol & Ellen Kay Trimberger, „Revolutions and the Development of Capitalism” in Theda Skocpol, *Social Revolutions in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Charles Tilly, „Does Modernization Breed Revolution?” in *Revolutions. Theoretical, Comparative and Historical Studies*, ed. Jack A. Goldstone, Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2008; or Charles Tily, *Regimes and Repertoires*, (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006).

²⁵Goldstone, „The Comparative and Historical Study of Revolutions” (2008), 6-7.

²⁶Foran, *Taking Power. On the Origins of Third World Revolutions*, 11.

²⁷Foran, „Theories of Revolution Revisited: Toward a Fourth Generation?”, 3-4.

²⁸Foran, „Theories of Revolution Revisited: Toward a Fourth Generation?”, 16-17.

²⁹Jack A. Goldstone, „Toward a Fourth Generation of Revolutionary Theory”, *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 4 (2001): 172.

³⁰Goldstone, „Toward a Fourth Generation of Revolutionary Theory”, 172.

At the same time, it is important to notice that Goldstone insists that continuity between the structuralist theories and the fourth generation is maintained. Fourth generation theories remain theories that deal not only with the multi-causal nature of revolution, but also try to find explanations for the results. Moreover, the future theories of revolution must accommodate actors more diverse than earlier theoretical endeavors, while accounting for the importance of concepts such as identity, ideology or gender, while methodologically, rational choice theory, quantitative or Boolean approaches should define fourth generation studies³¹.

Limits of the generational classification

The limits of the generational classification concern the exclusion of several important contributions to the study of revolutions, the problems concerning the leading characteristics that define the first generation of theories, the flexibility in identifying and defining the different categories (especially the differences that set apart the second and the third generation) and the bias towards the structuralist perspective, shown especially by the debate on the merits of the fourth generation of theories. Last, but not least, the appeal to agency and culture in the study of revolution is not sufficient to draw a distinction between the third and the fourth generation of theories of revolution as works related to the structuralist wave already employ these approaches and as the epistemic and methodologic assumptions of the third generation can remain unchallenged even while focusing on culture or ideology.

Some of the limits the generational classification exhibits are not particular to the classification itself – the flexibility and elusiveness in regards to several theoretical perspectives and concepts is common to several such perspectives. Sometimes, the classifications lead to definitional extremes – the methodological and epistemic framework of a particular theory can be transformed easily in the main theoretical tenets of another perspective. For example, Johnson is convinced that relative deprivation theories are theories that focus on agency, because of the emphasis they place on the individual apprehension of the deprivation. Moreover, Johnson believes that there are few differences that set apart Huntington and Skocpol. Eisenstadt, on the other hand, takes a different perspective, placing in the same category the „natural historians of revolution” and the relative deprivation theorists (in spite of the fiery criticism that Gurr levels against Edwards or Brinton).

Another prominent flaw of all major classification attempts is their inability to encompass all the major works in the field. The problem, which is common to the generational classification, has three aspects. On the one hand, while some endeavors may be considered proto-theoretical indeed, such as Tocqueville’s account of the effects of the French revolution, their influence on contemporary theoretical models is indisputable. Moreover, while a case can be made for the exclusion of authors which do not attempt to build-up theoretical models (such as Tocqueville or Arendt), the same cannot be said about works which deal precisely with the topic of revolution – for example, with the prominent exception of Tilly’s attempt, few classifications try to fit in Marx or Lenin. Last, but not least, prominent theoretical models remain unaddressed by the classifications.

The generational perspective is in essence an epistemic attempt inspired by Popper’s and Kuhn’s criteria regarding theoretical endeavors³². Thus generations are employed rather as paradigms – successive theoretical waves that initially try to explain the exemplary cases of the empiric area studied, before attacking the central major hypotheses. Moreover, in a truly Popperian manner, theories are disproven for neither Goldstone nor Foran by empiric reality, but by other theoretical endeavors, belonging to latter generations, that manage to offer a better explanation of revolutionary events. The influence of Kuhn and Popper is nevertheless not dominant – Skocpol is criticized for her theory’s inability of predicting or explaining the 1989 revolutionary wave or the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

³¹ Goldstone, „Toward a Fourth Generation of Revolutionary Theory”, 175.

³² See Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, London & New York, 2002 and Thomas Kuhn, *Structura revoluțiilor științifice*, București: Humanitas, 2008.

There are at the same time several other problems with the generational classification. The chronologic influence makes it at times rigid and leads the inclusion in a generation of works and concepts that belong to different epistemic traditions and which employ different if not outright incompatible research methodologies. For example, the first generation, that of the “natural historians” seems rather a post-factum attempt of artificially setting up a category in order to group together the first attempts of studying the revolutionary phenomenon. The coherence of the generation is given rather by the preference of the authors included in the category to compare revolutions to natural phenomena and by the common professional background (historians). Moreover, chronology matters. Brinton for example, in spite of a positivist-inspired methodology, remains concerned with the importance of accepted ideological prescriptions during the course of revolution.

Moreover, if the role of the first generation is to comprise the foundational theoretical, it is striking to observe that important attempts at studying revolution are simply left out. The works of Sorokin, Adams, Le Bon, Tocqueville or early Marxist perspectives are left out. The “natural history of revolutions” serves rather as a target of later generations, needed in order to establish epistemic legitimacy.

At the same time, it is important to notice that the generational perspective is no stranger to ignoring the contributions of authors that come from outside the major debates on the nature and study of revolutions. Authors such as Arendt, Dunn, Dahrendorf, or Walzer are difficult to accommodate within the generational perspectives, although their contributions gain paradigmatic relevance.

Moreover, I believe that the distinctions between the second and the third generation are themselves problematic. On the one hand, it is obvious that some authors remain problematic and tend to blur the distinction between the two generations – Tilly’s and Huntington’s cases are symptomatic to this regard, both authors shifting between the two generations without becoming comfortable members of neither one of them. Sometimes the internal borders within generations shift in order to make room for “unclassifiable” authors - it is for this reason that relative deprivation becomes for Goldstone in his second attempt to describe the generational classification a theory concerning disequilibria within systems in order to better integrate Huntington’s thesis on the impacts of modernization.

Moreover, the differences between the second and the third generation exclude that both categories of theories share a significant positivist outlook, being both integral parts of the tradition of explanation within social sciences³³. The insistence on causality is another clear link between second and third generation theories. Moreover, in spite of Aya’s criticism, there are few differences between the “volcanic” model of revolution and structural analysis. Both generations have a similar outlook on structural or systemic imbalances. Epistemically there can be no distinction between a theory explaining revolution as the result of an incredible accumulation of individual discontent and resentment and a theory that posits that the increasing difficulties of state institutions in front of political, military or economic challenges eventually result in revolutions. The differences lie in the level of analysis where each theory chooses to operate – while second generation theories prefer to focus on disequilibria between the different components of the wider social system, third generation theories focus either on the relationship between the autonomous states and the wider international system they are a part of or on the dynamics of particular institutions. The implicit difference seems to be rather that between the implicit functionalist assumptions of the second generations, heavily influenced by Parsons and the Marxist heritage or influence of many of the third generation theories.

³³ For the distinction between explaining and understanding see Martin Hollis, *The Philosophy of Social Science. An Introduction*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) or Martin Hollis and Steve Smith, *Explaining and Understanding International Relations*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

Imbalances or wider institutional disequilibria are the causes of revolution – the difference is to what degree human societies do act as systems and to what degrees are revolutions functions of the system itself.

Nikki R. Keddie also insists that the concept of a gap between expectations and results or of a structural imbalance is not enough to differentiate between second and third generation theories³⁴. She suggests that the difference between the two groups of theories might lie with the different empiric load theories operate with. In order to improve the validity of their predictions, second generation theorists attempt to increase the number of cases taken into analysis, even if this means sometimes leaving the space of revolutions and discussing border-line cases (or wider social collective actions involving violence), whereas the proponents of structural theories focus on a reduced number of cases (successful social revolutions). However, while Skocpol focuses indeed on a handful of cases, both Gurr and Tilly try to encompass rebellions, revolts or wider protest movements altogether, thereby expanding the field of inquiry, but raising the additional question of unwarranted concept elasticity.

Moreover, theories from both generations are concerned on some occasions with the same phenomena. Neil Smelser tries to explain collective action, the focus of many of Charles Tilly's works – it is obvious that the methodology and the dynamics of the authors are nevertheless different.

In spite of Foran's or Goldstone's attempt to draw clear lines between the two generations, theories belonging to these groups easily become interchangeable. The most puzzling aspect is that the authors belonging to the categories themselves have no trouble in breaking the boundaries between the second and the third generation. Gurr's thesis can easily be equated with that of Skocpol, as far as Eisenstadt is concerned. His own analysis on the nature of political and institutional centers is similar with Tilly's view on the relations between elite groups Aya has no trouble in explaining Theda Skocpol's hypotheses in Tilly's terms³⁵: the revolutionary situations whose importance he emphasizes are the "political revolutionary crises" Skocpol considers as paramount for the outbreak of revolutions.

The generational classification also ignores agent-centered theories. Neither Freud-inspired perspectives, nor theories employing a rational approach to the study of revolutions find themselves comprised by the generational classifications (although it is important to note that rational choice theory is considered by the framers of the classification itself and by prominent third generation theorists a useful addition to the study of revolutions).

The fourth generation of theories is also affected by the imprecision regarding its definitions. Foran and Goldstone do not agree on its main tenets and research objectives, or on its relationship in regards to the structuralist theories. While Goldstone believes that fourth generation theories might perfect the flaws of the third generation, Foran is passionate about the new directions that theories of revolution might explore: integrating agency-centered approaches and culture into the study of revolutions.

While insisting on agency and culture addresses the vulnerabilities attributed to structural theories might prove itself the solution to the study of revolutions, it is important to note that structural theorists themselves (nor their precursors) are that averse to discussing ideology and culture. Skocpol herself becomes eventually convinced that ideology can fit into her causal explanatory pattern³⁶, whereas Eisenstadt focuses from the start on integrating cultural explanations into his theoretical model.

³⁴Nikki R. Keddie, „Introduction” in *Debating Revolutions*, ed. Nikki R. Keddie, IX-XI (New York and London: New York University Press, 1995).

³⁵Aya, *Rethinking Revolution and Collective Violence. Studies on Concept, Theory and Method*, 72.

³⁶See Theda Skocpol, „Cultural idioms and political ideologies in the revolutionary reconstruction of state power. A rejoinder to Sewell” in Theda Skocpol, *Social Revolutions in the Modern World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 199-208.

The image of the fourth generation is therefore problematic. Insistence on agency, for example, under the guise of rational choice theory is neither a new attempt, nor has it opened revolutionary venues in the study of revolution³⁷, Aya himself arguing in its favor under the label of “vicarious problem solving”³⁸. One of the most poignant criticisms to Skocpol suggests rational choice perspectives should be pursued in the study of revolutions³⁹. While some fourth generation theorists might indeed question many leading assumptions of the third (or second) generation of theorists, it is by no means obvious that the post-structuralist effort marks or should mark a paradigmatic or epistemic break with previous undertakings. Third generation theories are not hostile *per se* to discussing agency. In addition to that, discussing culture does not equate to taking an agent-centered perspective and, as Michael Taylor shows, rational choice approaches are not incompatible with structuralist theoretical endeavors.

Moreover, structures and top-down constraining influence can be cultural as well. Francesca Poletta makes a convincing appeal towards “investigating the objective resources and constraints determined by the dimension of political structure”⁴⁰. Simply appealing to culture does not entail shifting the study of revolutions towards an agent-centered perspective. In this light, culture becomes simply another structure that can fit the multi-causal pattern Goldstone calls for. However, adding culture to the list of structural constraints only increases the conceptual elasticity within the field - Charles Kuzman makes a convincing case in arguing that multi-causal patterns beg prioritization: “states matter, culture matters, social structure matters, accidents and history matters, everything matters”⁴¹.

The transition from the first generation of natural historians to the post-structuralist research agenda is not that sudden and is not marked by increased paradigmatic differences or epistemic debates. The conclusion that new research into revolution must bring forth agency and culture does not entail by itself major changes, nor does it warrant a breach with extant epistemic assumptions or methodology.

Conclusion

The generational classification remains undoubtedly a major focal point in the study of revolutions. Its flaws however are numerous. First of all, the categories themselves call for additional definitions, as overlapping between theoretical models seems to become at times a major issue. The distinction between the second generation of theories and the structuralist group of theories is problematic, as is the precise positioning of several authors. Secondly, numerous contributions are left outside the taxonomy, while alternative perspectives are too easily discarded. Fourth, the classification is not able to illustrate the main inter-paradigmatic debates within the field of theories of revolution. The generational classification places a major emphasis on the role of the third generation in shaping our accounts of the revolutionary phenomenon. This focus however is insufficient in clearing out the attributes and characteristics of the post-structuralist effort, which is not saved by the appeal for the study of culture and the integration into main theoretical models of agent-centered perspectives.

³⁷For an interesting perspective analyzing revolutions from a rational choice perspective see Erich Weede and Edward N. Muller, „Rebellion, Violence and Revolution: A Rational Choice Perspective” in *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol 35, 1 (1998): 43-59.

³⁸Aya, *Rethinking Revolution and Collective Violence. Studies on Concept, Theory and Method*, 70.

³⁹See Michael Taylor, „Structure, Culture and Action in the Explanation of Social Change” in *Politics and Society*, 17 (1989), 116-119.

⁴⁰Francesca Poletta, „Culture Is Not Just In Your Head”, in Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper (eds), *Rethinking Social Movements: Structure, Meaning and Emotion*, (Boulder, Oxford, New York, Toronto: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2004), 97.

⁴¹Charles Kuzman, „The Post-Structuralist Consensus in Social Movement Theory” in Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper (eds), *Rethinking Social Movements: Structure, Meaning and Emotion*, (Boulder, Oxford, New York, Toronto: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2004), 113.

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