The First and the Fourth Generation of Revolutionary Theories: A Common Ground for a Clinical Theory

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Abstract. A careful analysis of the revolutionary process reveals a theoretical blind spot concerning the social psychological impact of the fall of the old regime. This area is in the article conceptualized as a sickness which manifests itself in both physiological and psychological symptoms and thereby forms the foundation of a clinical theory of revolution. The clinical theory is derived from both the general patterns of revolutions observed by the natural historians and from the anthropological theory of liminality.

INTRODUCTION

A revolution is a complex phenomenon. I believe this explains why there are many conflicting theories regarding crucial questions like: What is a revolution? What causes a revolution? When and where does a revolution occur? Who are the revolutionaries? and What kind of change does a revolution bring? (Selbin 2010, 3, Goldstone 2003, 19). Scholars from different academic fields approach these questions with different theories and methods. This article concentrates on violent political transformations which replaces an old regime with a new regime.
I started my own research focusing on the works of the natural historians of the early 20th century with a particular interest in Crane Brinton’s classic work *The Anatomy of Revolution*. According to Jack Goldstone’s useful classification, Brinton’s work is theoretically located in the first of four different generations of revolutionary theories (Goldstone 2003, 2). As I moved on to study the works of the second, third and fourth generations it struck me how well *The Anatomy of Revolution* stood out compared to most works of later date. As has often been pointed out by e.g. Theda Skocpol, the First Generation’s perhaps greatest achievement is their description of common patterns derived from comparisons of mainly the great revolutions (Skocpol 1979, 37, Goldstone 2003, 2).

The First Generation has chiefly been criticized for its vagueness when it comes to elaborating on the causes of revolutions (Skocpol 1979, 38, Goldstone 2003, 4). The problem of isolating variables which explain why revolutions occur has turned out to be very difficult. This is as true for the quantitative as it is for the qualitative methods used by the later generations of revolutionary theory (Foran 1997, 7). It is indeed tempting to say: a good description is always more useful than a bad explanation. This is not to say all research focusing on why revolutions occur is bad – some is certainly very useful – but its main contributions have in my opinion, ironically, been more descriptive than explanatory.

Ever since the decline of the Third Generation, revolutionary theories have attempted to modify some of their shortcomings using a different theoretical angle. These theories – which are normally referred to as the Fourth Generation – take into consideration factors which do not neatly fit into a plain structural theoretical model (e.g., leadership, ideology and culture). The Fourth Generation has opened up a different set of questions and hence a need for deeper collaboration across disciplinary borders. Attempts to conceptualize the revolution as a process with different stages (of which each stage demands different theoretical processing) have been prolific.

In this article I will try to show how the First Generation touches the very core of what a grand revolution is and why these events tend to develop in a certain direction. Like Brinton I perceive the revolution as a state of sickness (Brinton 1963). Therefore I call my theoretical contribution a clinical theory. How a sickness (a revolution) affects the patient (a state) is best diagnosed and observed, not explained (in causal terms) or reduced to a certain setting of quantifiable variables.
WHAT IS A REVOLUTION?

A transformational process or a radical shift?

It is not obvious whether one should conceive of a revolution as a drawn-out transformational process or as a short radical shift. The very term revolution seems to both indicate a process of transformation and one of a sharp transition. Emphasizing only the long-term transformational aspect of a revolution seems to blur the crucial difference between a “normal” evolutionary process and an “abnormal” revolutionary process. On the other hand, “revolution” would mean little more than change if the longer-term transformational aspects of the word were overlooked. Thus I conclude that a revolution is a transformational change, consisting of long term causes and long term effects, which culminates in a radical shift somewhere between these two.

I suggest a revolution needs to be separated from a revolt. A revolt does not necessary imply the same range of long-term causes and effects as a revolution, nor does it imply a clear shift from an old order to a new order. This, however, does not mean a revolt may not at least indirectly affect the course of a future revolution. Indeed it is quite normal for revolts to occur before the actual revolution and to be, at the time, perceived as a minor event or largely failed attempt at a revolution. Such revolts should in my opinion nonetheless not be regarded as a part of a revolution unless they are clearly temporarily and causally linked to the main shift.¹

¹ Note that I am not explicitly discussing the political phenomena connected with different kinds of changes. Rather I use the terms “revolt” and “revolution” in a more general and theoretical sense. The distinction between the terms made here has to my knowledge not been made by any other scholar. Whether all kind of revolts and revolutions relate to a shift in the way described here is a matter of debate. It seems obvious that e.g. the French revolution culminated in a much more evident shift than e.g. the Industrial revolution. Nevertheless if the Industrial revolution indeed had a beginning and an end it should be possible at least in theory to argue it culminated in some kind of shift as well.
Revolt and Revolution

Two main categories of transformations

It seems violence is a good term to start with when trying to define what a revolution is. Indeed the most obvious difference between two recent phenomena referred to as

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2 All scholars do not agree that violence is inseparable from a revolution in the political sense. Zimmermann writes: “The use of violence is not the characteristic of revolutions, yet violence often is an unavoidable ingredient in carrying out a revolution” (Zimmermann 1983, 296). Yet when Zimmermann defines a revolution he concludes “[A revolution] usually involves the use of considerable violence […] (Ibid., 298)”. In Huntington’s famous definition of revolution the word “violent” is included without any reservations (Huntington 1968, 264). Chalmers Johnson even goes as far as calling a nonviolent revolution “a contradiction in terms” (Johnson 1968, 7). If Zimmermann’s argument is correct one might ask if violence is not the best characteristic of revolution, then what is? When defining a revolution it is necessary to have some basic criteria. It seems less controversial to include violence as a basic criterion than including words like
revolutions, the Arab revolutions (sometimes referred to as the Arabic Spring) and the IT revolution, is that the first is violent while the second is not. There is nothing *per se* which makes spreading information violent, while political conflicts tend to be violent (unless legal and legitimate means are provided to deal with the conflict peacefully). I agree with what Hannah Arendt writes in her famous *On Revolutions*:

> The relevance of the problem of beginning to the phenomenon of revolution is obvious. That such a beginning must be intimately connected with violence seems to be vouched for the legendary beginnings of our history as both biblical and classical antiquity report it: Cain slew Abel, and Romulus slew Remus; violence was the beginning and, by the same token, no beginning could be made without using violence, without violating (Arendt 2006, 10).

Politics, of which revolutions are very much a part, is at least partly by its nature violent. It is to a large extent operating in a sphere different from e.g. science even though these are certainly not air-tightly separated. IT technology can e.g. intentionally be used for political aims or its use may unintentionally cause a political reaction. To make a distinction is however of great theoretical importance. This is because it makes it possible not only to separate many primary non-political phenomena labeled as revolutions from the political sphere but also to separate non-violent phenomena labeled as revolutions within the political sphere from the violent political transformations.

So far I have suggested that a revolution is a transformational process which most evidently manifests itself in a radical shift and that a revolt is similar process which does not cause a radical shift. I will use the term “transformation” when referring to both phenomena.

“*elite*” or “*structure*” which Zimmermann uses himself (Zimmermann 1983, 298). After all, a good definition should have a practical application. I think it is easier to operationalize violence (e.g. a certain number of deaths related to the fall of the old regime) than “*elite*” or “*structure*”.

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Transformations

Fig. 2. The distinction between violent and non-violent transformations leads to four different subcategories: violent revolutions, violent revolts, non-violent revolutions and non-violent revolts. Between each category there is a grey zone. In the grey zones the different categories interact with each other.

Some of the most well known revolutions in the history of man can be roughly placed in the model above. The Scientific revolution of the 15th century and the Industrial revolution of the 18th century can be placed in the of category non-violent revolutions. The French and the Russian revolutions can on the other hand be placed in the category of violent revolutions. Non-violent revolts are potentially revolutionary discoveries, inventions, ideas and so forth which did not cause an immediate paradigm shift. The “four great Chinese inventions” could perhaps be given as an example of non-violent revolts. Finally, violent revolts are failed political attempts to change society. Examples of violent revolts are the Great Peasants’ Revolt in 16th century and The Prague Spring of 1968.

It is important to notice that all four categories of transformation are part of the same human history. They all directly or indirectly affect each other so it is useless to

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3 The four great Chinese inventions (the compass, gunpowder, papermaking and printing) did have a great impact on Chinese civilization. However, from a global historical perspective one cannot help wondering if these discoveries could not have been more efficiently utilized and thereby caused a fundamental break in the world order. This fact has raised the interesting question why China – e.g. during the Ming dynasty – did not expand as the uprising Western powers?
make a more scrupulous distinction. It is also worth mentioning that some historical events simply do not fall neatly into any category other than perhaps the interaction categories (e.g. the largely non-violent but still sociopolitical revolutions which led to the fall of communism in Eastern Europe). Still I believe the model serves its main purpose: to locate the political phenomena which people normally associate with the word revolution. Thus the focus of this article is focused on the black segment in the model viz. violent revolts and revolutions with emphasis on the latter rather than the former.

The origin of the political concept of revolution

As discussed above, a revolution in the political sense is a violent shift from an old order to a new order. But what does a shift from one order to another mean in political terms? The first thing that probably comes to mind for a political scientist is a radical change in the power structure of a state. After all it seems clear all the great revolutions have one thing in common: violent overthrow of a political leader. This assumption nevertheless needs to be clarified. Political leaders of all sorts have probably been violently overthrown as long as there have been political leaders. Does this mean revolutions are as old as politics itself?

In political terms the word “revolution” seems to imply more than just a violent overthrow of a political leader. Indeed it seems to imply not only a concrete shift in the physical aspect of leadership but also an immaterial shift in the ideas related to leadership. For such a shift to take place it seems obvious that some kind of established political body is necessary. The question is therefore what kind of political body is required for a revolution?

I think the answer partly reveals itself when one scrutinizes how the meaning of the word “revolution” has changed through history. The following passage can be found in Zimmermann’s analysis of the conceptual roots of revolution:

Apparently there is no unequivocal origin of the term revolution. On the contrary, there seem to be several roots. “Only during the late Christian period did the concept “revolution” appear (as the substantive to “revolver”) denoting turning around and circular movement, the orbit of the moon and, finally, in a figurative sense (in

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4 A good example can be taken from the oft-quoted dialogue between King Louis XVI of France and the Duc de La Rochefoucauld during the night after the capture of the Bastille: “C’est une révolte” – “Non, sire, c’est une revolution” (Selbin 2010, 1). The dialogue – if it indeed did take place – seems to indicate the king had not fully comprehended the magnitude (neither physical nor immaterial) of the political change taking place.
Augustin’s writings) the idea of reincorporation or return of the times” (GRIEWANK 1969: 17; my translation). For Dante revolution similarly meant the change of the stars. A famous example of one of the original meanings of the term is found in the main work of Copernicus, *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium*, appearing two centuries later in 1543 (Zimmermann 1983, 294).

It is somewhat surprising that the word “revolution” today is understood as a change to something new when it originally had the meaning of a return to the original position. Zimmermann suggests the word revolution was given its pre-modern meaning when the English liberals wanted to reinstall a righteous king during the Glorious Revolution. Hence they wanted to create something new paradoxically by restoring something old (Zimmermann 1983, 294-295).

The German historian Reinhard Koselleck argues in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* that the modern political languages was fundamentally shaped during what he calls the *Sattelzeit* period roughly between 1750-1850 (Iggers 1996, 127-128). I would argue it was during this time the word “revolution” gradually got the meaning of the people’s rightful upheaval against the unrighteous ruling elite in order to bring a sociopolitical change. The farther one moves back in history from the *Sattelzeit* period the less clear it is to me whether one can indeed speak of a revolution without committing an anachronism. The reason for this has to do with the rise of the modern state.

The development of the modern state not only fundamentally changed how the administrative aspect of the political body was to be organized (bureaucracy, economy, warfare and so forth) but it also changed how people came to perceive the relation between themselves and those who ruled them. These two aspects brought about structural and ideological changes, with which states have had to cope ever since, with varying degrees of success. I would therefore argue that the political body necessary for a revolution is a state. Without a state – or at least a rudimental state – a revolution is no more possible than a car accident without a car.
The substantial difference between violent transformations

An event which changes the political governance in a state with violent means may in all simplicity be called a revolution.\(^5\) The problem is that there are several political phenomena which fit the definition above. War is a good example of such a phenomenon. Few would however call the imposed democracy by the Allied forces in West Germany or the Soviet-imposed socialism in East Germany a revolution. Similar examples can also be given concerning phenomena we normally refer to as violent protests, rebellions, and coups. For this reasons it is necessary to stipulate some further criteria which an event need to satisfy in order to qualify as a revolution. I suggest four core criteria in addition to those already mentioned (violence, complete shift, taking place in a state).\(^6\) These criteria are best scrutinized in the form of dichotomies, since actual cases are never black or white, but rather closer to one pole or the other.\(^7\)

*Endogenous not exogenous.* A revolution derives mainly from internal rather than external factors. While it is true external factors do matter in revolutions, the main reason a state attracts aggression or some other kind of external interference is because of its inner inability to react adequately to external stimuli. This is not to say a revolution cannot be triggered by an external reaction. Nor is it to say a revolution cannot cause an external reaction. The point is rather that revolutions happen mainly within a state and not between states. The endogenous aspect of a revolution also comprises a shift in governance which affects the whole state. Thus the aim of a revolution is not to change the political control of a certain region by dividing the state, but to wipe out the old regime’s control of the whole state. Therefore a line should be drawn between interstate wars, civil wars, separatist wars, and wars of independence on one hand and revolutions on the other.

*Explosive not implosive.* A revolution is a rapid political change where the old regime suddenly and often unpredictably finds itself in a defensive position. This change is

\(^5\) From now on I will use only the word revolution when I am referring to what I previously called violent revolutions.

\(^6\) When discussing the substantial difference between violent transformations I will here largely focus on Huntington’s basic criteria in his famous definition of revolution (Huntington 1968, 264). I will elaborate on the words “domestic”, “rapid”, “violent” and “fundamental” with the hope of responding to some of the critique Huntington’s definition has been subjected to. I will fully adopt only the last word “fundamental” as my own. In the other cases I use endogenous instead of domestic, explosive instead of rapid and potent instead of violent. Huntington’s whole definition can been found later in the article under the topic “A definition of social revolution”.

\(^7\) The statements made regarding the different dichotomies are as far as I can tell well known “facts” about revolutions found in the standard literature. Nevertheless the point here is to illustrate the basic differences between what I think are the major violent transformations. Therefore I have chosen not to make any further effort to back up every single statement with a reference.
not exclusively rapid in the temporal sense. It also bears connotations of an escalating “ politicization” of society. This means people’s political awareness is heightened and activated on a massive scale. In the most spectacular cases this happens before the fall of the old regime, hence adding to the political turbulence. In less spectacular cases the mainstream political awareness of a change takes place only after the old regime has fallen. In cases which cannot be classified as revolutions the politicization may be rapid but does not result in, nor follow from, overthrowing the old regime. In fact large-scale violent protests share the explosive hallmarks of a revolution but must be seen as different phenomena since they do not result in the dethronement of the old regime.

Potent not impotent. A revolution rests on real power that is both ideological and military power. No regime which considers itself legal and legitimate will step down without a fight. Thus a revolution draws its power not only from the masses, but also from an elite of “insiders”. “Insiders” may not only consist of a political echelon of dissatisfied members of the sociopolitical elite but also of a self-trained or a professionally trained military clique. To say a revolution is potent is not the same as saying it is violent. Any kind of political protest can turn violent but only very few become powerful. Thus all kind of rebellions which are rooted in violent but still not potent power structures must be excluded from the term revolution because they lack the typical cadre of ideological and military experts.

Fundamental not rudimental. A revolution emanates from different opinions of what kind of change is necessary and it results in radical attempts of reorganizing not just the political leadership but also socioeconomic structures, values, myths, and symbols of the past. This attempt bears clear characteristics of religious fervor. Everything and everybody connected with the ideas of the old regime is being regarded with hostility. The great change brought by the revolution is not only seen as a salvation for one’s own country but in the long run even for the rest of the world. The demand for fundamental change clearly separates some revolutions from coups. Since a successful coup meets the basic criteria of a complete shift the border between a revolution and a successful coup seems somewhat subtle. This raises the question whether it is necessary to make a distinction between two different kinds of revolutions?

In order to solve this problem I suggest a distinction between four different violent transformations. The terminology used is based on the essential distinction between
a revolt and a revolution discussed in the beginning of the article. To this I add the words “social” and “political” to clarify the difference discussed above.

The criteria of violent transformations

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Fig. 3. An X marks the presence of a factor related to the phenomenon of revolution and revolt. The only phenomenon which complies with all four factors (expressed as dichotomies) is the social revolution. The political revolution fulfills three, the social revolt two and the political revolt only one. The crucial limit between a revolution and a revolt is therefore the necessity to fulfill at least three factors in the order demonstrated above.

The dynamic difference between violent transformations

I have suggested four kinds of different violent transformations: the political revolt, the social revolt, the political revolution and the social revolution. I have further listed four dichotomies to clarify the essential differences between the different violent transformations. The dichotomies serve mainly to point out criteria which can be connected with each phenomenon. However, I think it is also necessary to clarify the origin and the aim of each violent transformation. The dichotomy explosive not implosive says something
about the first and the dichotomy fundamental not rudimental says something about the latter. The discussion above nevertheless does not expose the dynamics of violent transformations and therefore needs to be further scrutinized.

A violent transformation that is explosive rather than implosive is a rapid political reorientation of the people. This does not exclusively mean people change (or are forced to change) their fundamental political beliefs in a short period of time. It can also mean that people during a brief period of time simply have to acknowledge a political transformation has taken place. The difference between the two is crucial. If people on a large scale are aware of a possible change taking place it is likely a significant segment of these people will try to influence the change. But if the change has already taken place it is likely most people will wait and see how other people will react to the change. In the first case the violent transformation will mainly originate from below (from the people). In the latter case the violent transformation will mainly originate from above (from an elite).

In the beginning of the article it was pointed out that a revolution is a successful shift and a revolt is an unsuccessful shift. The difference between a fundamental change and a rudimental change has further been pointed out. The question rises; can a revolution be rudimental? It indeed seems like what normally is referred to as coups are rudimental revolutions. They are revolutions in the sense that the old regime is to some extent removed by violent means and rudimental in the sense they mainly change the governance of a state not the socioeconomic structures of the whole society. The only violent transformation that indeed fundamentally changes not only the governance of the state but also the society is the social revolution, also known as the grand revolution. I both cases the violent transformations nevertheless result in a complete shift of political power. Therefore I will adopt the terms complete shift and incomplete shift referring exclusively to the shift in the governance of the state.

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8 The idea that social revolutions originate – or at least are carried out – from below was clearly articulated by Skocpol. She defines a social revolution “[A]s a rapid, basic transformation of a society’s state and class structures; and they are accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below” (Skocpol 1979, 4). See further the discussion related to the topic “A definition of social revolution”.

9 A similar distinction between a social and a political revolution might have been done by Leon Trotsky. In a quote by Trotsky found in Charles Tilly’s book From Mobilization to Revolution the word “political revolution” appears. By quoting Trotsky Tilly nevertheless seems to be more interested in emphasizing how the typical weakness during a “revolutionary situation” manifests itself. If I understand Tilly (and perhaps Trotsky) correctly their understanding of a political revolution is more like a rehearsal for the coming social revolution (something like the revolt in Russia in 1905) than a violent transformation which forms its own momentum (Tilly 1978, 190-191). If that indeed is the case our understanding of the term political revolution differs.
The dynamic of violent transformations

![Figure 4](image)

**Fig. 4.** The four different violent transformations divided according to the origin of the transformation and the scope of the shift.

**A definition of social revolution**

Many scholars in the field of revolutionary theory have developed influential definitions of revolutions. The perhaps best known definitions in the 20th century are Samuel Huntington’s and Theda Skocpol’s definitions. Huntington defines a revolution as: “a rapid, fundamental, and violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths of a society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership, and government activity and policies” (Huntington 1968, 264). Skocpol on the other hand wants to encompass the basic mechanism behind what she calls a “social revolution” by adding to Huntingtons definitions:

What is unique to social revolutions is that basic changes in social structure and in political structure occur together in a mutually reinforcing fashion. And these changes occur through intense sociopolitical conflicts in which class struggles play a key role (Skocpol 1979, 4-5).
Both definitions have been criticized as the knowledge of revolutions has increased. A discernible difference in the understanding of the word appears in Jack Goldstone’s article Toward A Fourth Generation of Revolutionary Theory. Goldstone stipulates three basic criteria for a revolution: “(a) efforts to change the political regime that draw on competing vision (or visions) of a just order, (b) a notable degree of informal or formal mass mobilization, and (c) efforts to force change through noninstitutionalized actions such as mass demonstrations, protests, strikes, or violence.” (Goldstone 2001, 142). Goldstone nevertheless skillfully avoids a clear conceptual demarcation by using words like “effort” (instead of complete shift), “force” (instead of violence) and “a notable degree of informal or formal mass mobilization” (instead mobilization from below).

As I have proposed the word “revolution” can have two basic meanings. In both cases a revolution presupposes a complete and violent transfer of the political power in a state. The difference lies in how deeply the causes of the shift are rooted in the pre-revolutionary state and society and how deeply the post-revolutionary state and society is affected by the shift. In other words, the political revolution could be perceived as a lighter version of the social revolution.

In this article I have adopted the Brintonian way of analyzing the revolution. In The Anatomy of Revolution Brinton scrutinizes the revolution just like a pathologist would analyze a disease. The most interesting case for a pathologist is the one that embodies all the characteristics of the disease. To Brinton such a case is the great revolution (what social scientist today call the social revolution). The social revolution contains all the crucial stages of what could be called the revolutionary process. This is why the social revolution is particularly interesting when it comes to the question of definition. I define a social revolution as: an endogenous, potent, explosive, and complete shift of political power within a state, emanating from below but catalyzed by a vanguard aiming at fundamentally changing the structures of society.

10 Goldstone concludes: “These elements can be combined to provide a broader and more contemporary definition of revolution: an effort to transform the political institutions and the justifications for political authority in a society, accompanied by formal or informal mass mobilization and noninstitutionalized actions that undermine existing authorities” (Goldstone 2001, 142).
REVOLUTIONARY THEORIES

What causes a revolution?

In the first part of this article the first major question: What is a revolution? was scrutinized. How a person decides to answer that question determines to some extent how he or she will approach the second major question What causes a revolution? There have been many different attempts to answer not only this question but also the other major questions mentioned in the introduction. In this article it is not possible to encompass and give justice to all relevant theories. Here I will only summarize what I think are the major theoretical turns and insights. For a political scientist the search for causes is of particular interest since knowing what causes what enables prediction. Few scholars would argue we will ever be able to say exactly when a revolution will occur, but some claim we stand a good chance of making rather good probabilistic predictions (Goldstone 2001, 174).

The more precise attempts to elaborate causes of revolutions go back to the Second Generation. Scholars noted that modernization seemed to be linked with the outbreak of revolutions during the decades following World War II. The interest in how modernization affects nations moved chiefly in two different directions. The first direction focused on the pressure created on state institutions when an increasing number of people were to be incorporated as active members in the polity. The second direction focused on aggregated psychological theories analyzing the outbreak of violence. The Second Generation culminated in attempts to coalesce these two theoretical intentions (Goldstone 2003, 5-6).

The fundamental break with the Second Generation came in the 1970s when theories influenced by Marxist and structural research emerged. The representatives of the Third Generations were influenced by the discoveries of scholars like Barrington Moore Jr. and Eric Wolf who had paid much attention to the effects of commercialization of the agricultural sector (Moore 1966, Wolf 1969). The key factor seemed to be the pressure capitalist competition brought on different states. This was by no means seen as a phenomenon taking place exclusively in the state itself but also between states. Skocpol showed how this development could be analyzed in structural terms and expressed a theory which indeed seemed to explain why revolutions occur (Skocpol 1979).
The structural theories were however somewhat dogmatic in their belief that revolutions occur, and are not man-made. As new cases of revolutions appeared on the world stage it became less justifiable to play down on factors related to agency and culture. Indeed it seemed like tables were about to turn, and the exact opposite of what the structural theorists had claimed were equally true; revolutions are made, they do not come. The Fourth Generation is still about to crystallize but it seems safe to say factors like leadership, ideology, mobilization, culture, ethnicity, and gender will have an impact. Indeed, as has been suggested, the very term revolution will probably have to be broken down into at least three stages: origin (or cause), unfolding, and outcome. Each of these stages might require different methods and theories to analyze (Goldstone 2001, 139-140, Foran 1997, 7, 124,).

Some explanatory evergreens seem to appear in almost every generation of revolutionary studies, although sometimes in different forms. The perhaps most common one is economic hardship. Exactly how it operates has been disputed ever since Marx. Some scholars have, like the First Generation, focused on state bankruptcy and fiscal problems whereas others, like The Second Generation, have focused on the social psychological effect an economic downturn might have (Brinton 1963, Davies 1962). The two seem to go together and in this article it is enough to simply point out what has been said before: misery matters when explaining revolutions. Another likely source of state crumbling is rapid population growth. Goldstone has elegantly showed how waves of escalating population growth have affected political stability over long range periods (Goldstone 1991). Shifts in international power structures have also for a long time been suspected to be connected with the outbreak of revolutions and sometimes even in the form of revolutionary waves (Katz 1997, Katz 2001). Finally fortune must not be forgotten. A bad crop, a plague, or an unexpected military defeat and so forth are all potential causes of a revolution. This cluster of potential causes may be referred to as the contingency factor.

**When and where does a revolution occur?**

A revolution is most likely to occur when a state is weak. It is often falsely assumed nondemocratic regimes have an intrinsic weakness which democratic states lack. This kind of arguing often derives from implicit – or in Francis Fukuyama’s case seemingly explicit –
assumptions of a teleological development (Fukuyama 1992). That is; history is predestined to produce pluralistic, liberal democracies firmly rooted in market economy. Thus states which have not yet reached a certain level of development are considered weak. Although it is true that nondemocratic states often have these kinds of problems, the same could be said about democracies. Especially partial democracies have proven to be much weaker than autocracies (Goldstone 2001, 166). Therefore, as Goldstone has pointed out, “regime characteristics alone seem to provide no help in ascertaining when and where revolution will strike” (Ibid., 172).

The structural theorists point out the importance of intrastate conflicts in explaining why and when revolutions occur. This observation was already in part made by the First Generation who did observe how different classes turned against, or were willing to abandon, the old regime (Skocpol 1979, Brinton 1963). In both cases the phenomenon may lead to “dual” or “multiple sovereignty” which greatly undermines the old regime (Brinton 1963, 132-137, Tilly 1978, 191). Goldstone has pointed out the old regime’s (in revolutionary states) inability to create a just and efficient political system as the main reason why it eventually collapses. However, Goldstone also stresses the importance of concessions and repressions. If such tactics are used skillfully by a regime – democratic or not – it may remain stable even though it is not particularly just or efficient compared to other states (Goldstone 2001, 148, 161-162). This is the reason why many scholars have emphasized the importance of external factors when explaining why certain regimes fall at a certain time.

Dependency theory has proven fruitful when analyzing the relation between states that undergo revolution and the international system. Obviously states influence each other in multiple ways (economically, militarily, ideologically, culturally, and so forth). In some cases it is reasonable to presuppose the world capitalist system itself creates a pressure which may trigger violent transformations in some states. In other cases the relation between a couple of states (e.g. a region) or mainly two states (a bilateral conflict) can have great influence on the revolutionary process. Sudden shifts in the world system (e.g. the shift to Glasnost in Soviet foreign policy) have been proven significant when explaining the time of the outbreak of revolutions and even revolutionary waves (Foran

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11 I rest this statement entirely on the impression I got from reading Fukuyamas famous *The End of History and the Last Man*. In fairness to Fukuyama it has to be pointed out that he admits temporary rebounds in the process of democratization.
When predictions are made about where and when revolutions are more likely to occur I think one should not only focus on typical signs of state weakness (e.g. intrastate conflicts) but also on the geopolitical dynamics in the region of the state. There are many factors which may cause external states to support (or withdraw the support) of the old regime, the rebels or - if a shift of powers occurs - the revolutionaries or the counter revolutionaries. These are factors like natural resources, ideological ambitions, the fear of the revolution spreading, or the dread of weapons of mass destruction ending up in the wrong hands, etc.

**Who are the revolutionaries?**

The question *who* seems to go in a different theoretical direction than the questions *why*, *when* and *where*. The second type of questions is somewhat more rooted in structural theories. These questions mainly look at the revolution as a complex set of key variables which by its constellation is supposed to explain different possibilities of political change. The question *who* on the other hand seems more rooted in agency and cultural theories. When a scholar moves from structural to agency and cultural oriented theories he or she tends to move from quantitative variables on a macro level to qualitative variables on a micro level.

During the last decades the most valuable criticism against the dominating revolutionary theories has been their unwillingness to acknowledge the importance of variables like ideology and leadership. To claim that Bolshevism did not play an important role in the Russian Revolution or that the leadership of Fidel Castro was of minor importance in the Cuban revolution simply does not seem true. The real question is therefore not whether agency and cultural theories have a place in the revolutionary theory, but rather how are they best handled?

Mobilization might be one of the key aspects to focus on when agency and

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12 I do maintain the primary reasons why revolutions occur are endogenous rather than exogenous. The similar pattern of weakness between states that undergo revolutions are far too great to prove otherwise. Goldstone writes: “Although the international environment can affect the risk of revolution in manifold ways, the precise impact of those effects, as well as the overall likelihood of revolution, is determined primarily by the internal relationships among state authorities, various elites, and various popular groups (peasants, workers, and regional or ethnic or religious minorities)” (Goldstone 2001, 146). Dependency theories are still very useful when it comes to predictions about when revolutions will occur. The chances of a weak state undergoing a revolution greatly increase if e.g. a sudden shift in the world system occurs (Foran 2005, 23).
culture is brought into the analysis of revolutions. Selbin points out a good revolutionary leader needs two qualities in order to be successful: “people-oriented” and “task-oriented”. Lacking one of these qualities means a leader needs to find a close associate who can complement his or her weakness (Selbin 1993). Nevertheless a good leader is not enough to mobilize people. Both a cultural filter and a network are needed to communicate a revolutionary message in order to kick off a rapid and radical large scale mobilization.

People respond to the same ideological input in different ways. This is not only explained by the personal qualities of a leader (e.g. charisma) but also by culture. Foran have shown a “culture of resistance” can be activated if the revolutionary rhetoric is compatible with a past collective experience of struggle. Still some kind of network seems important in order to spread the revolutionary message. How these networks operate have been analyzed mainly by resource mobilization theorists who have pointed out the importance of parties, unions, religious congregations and so forth. However, as Goldstone points out, it may not be the organizations themselves who are important, but rather the process in which protest identities are shaped. Why people join protest groups – sometimes with great risk and little reward – has to some extent been successfully analyzed using modified rational choice theories (Foran 2005, 21, Goldstone 2001, 153, 155, 163).

The simple answer to the question who are the revolutionaries? is: people who mobilize or are mobilized against the old regime. Why people are mobilized has briefly been sketched out here. In addition it can be noted that both ethnicity and gender aspects have called for some interest lately (Foran 1997, 5-6).

What kind of change does a revolution bring?

To analyze the outcome of a revolution I think one will have to deal with chiefly two problems; the problem of normativity and the problem of time. If a person has a negative outlook per se on revolutions, he or she will probably end up focusing on e.g. the violent and destructive aspects rather than on the transformative and modernizing aspects of the revolution. The same can be said about what a revolution brings. Does a revolution bring even worse tyranny or a golden era? To answer this question as objectively as possible one needs to compare relevant socioeconomic data before and after the revolution in as many relevant cases as possible. This method does however immediately lead to the second problem, the problem of time. When is a revolution over?
As Peter Siani-Davies points out in his analysis of the Romanian revolution: “Indeed, the end of any revolution is notoriously difficult to pin down, because, while it is essentially a political phenomenon, the term also bears connotations of wider cultural and socioeconomic change and this, by its very nature, tends to be a longer-term process.” (Siani-Davies 2007, 1). Goldstone discusses the difference between a strong and a weak conceptual framework to define the moment when a revolution has reached its end. By a weak definition Goldstone means the point when the new regime’s political power is no longer threatened by the old regime. By a strong definition Goldstone means a definition which tries to encompass the broader cultural and socioeconomic changes that have followed upon the fall of the old regime. (Goldstone 2001, 167). In my view both definitions may work but not equally well. How well it works depends on what kinds of questions are relevant to the study. In general I think about 10 years should pass after the fall of the old regime before any major conclusions about the outcomes can be drawn.\(^{13}\)

The First Generation made some interesting observations about the outcomes of revolutions which still seem accurate. The most important observation is perhaps that the revolutions tend to radicalize and ultimately lead to authoritarian rule. New radical ideas are brought to light on the wave of the revolution but turn out to fit rather poorly with the political reality. This situation normally creates even further economic problems and political turbulence (e.g. the outbreak of civil or interstate war). To bring back order a strong leader (normally with a military background like Cromwell or Bonaparte) consolidates the new regime with harsh methods. Slowly but surely life seemingly turns back to how it was before the revolution (Edwards 1927, Brinton 1963, Pettee 1971).

As already Tocqueville and Weber noted revolutions normally bring a more centralized and bureaucratic state. Another effect of the revolution is the cultural impact it

\(^{13}\) The English Revolution is normally considered to have taken place between 1640-1660, the American Revolution between 1774-1783, the French Revolution between 1789-1799 and the Russian 1917-1923. The timeframes may nevertheless be questioned. The relatively long period of the English Revolution can be explained by the wish to involve the entire era that occurs between the start of the English Civil War and the abolition of the Republic. The timeframe for the American Revolution is based on the beginning and end of the American Revolutionary War but it could also be argued that the revolution began somewhat earlier and ended slightly later. The French Revolution’s beginning could be placed during the crop failure in 1788 and it’s end at the disintegration of the National Convention or at the takeover of the Directorate. The classical view of the Russian Revolution is that it began in 1917 and ended when the Russian Civil War was settled. However as it became clear that the development in the Soviet Union did not follow what Lenin had foreseen, it became common to include the Stalin Terror as part of the Russian Revolution. To do so prolongs the revolution with decades. Assuming that the classical timeframes of the revolutions given above is roughly right the four revolutions on average lasted for about 10 years. However, there are reasons to believe revolutions of later date have had a shorter duration. A closer look at the already presented revolutions gives an indication of this (the English Revolution has the longest duration and the Russian Revolution the shortest).
may have. People may in part change the way they think about themselves and the revolution. This is normally manifested in new words being adopted in the language, the change of names of streets and squares, and the revolution itself being incorporated as a glorious event in the annals of history. These are all signs of rising nationalism. Nationalism is paradoxically the ideology that brings people together at the later stages of revolution (Brinton 1963, Foran 1997, 60, Goldstone 2003, 16-17, 33).

There have been to some extent successful attempts to show how revolutions affected welfare, the level of literacy, class transformation and so forth (Goldstone 2003, 85). I am somewhat skeptical about these results. Mainly because of the problems of objectivity and time already mentioned but also because of practical problems like lack of adequate statistical data. In some cases the external factors – for better or worse – have been very powerful in shaping the outcome of a revolution. Even though such reactions may be seen as a part of the revolution itself I think they may cause problems when analyzing the outcome. If the external effect could be removed from the revolutionary process but otherwise ceteris paribus the outcome may in many cases be very different. In other words what may be seen as the failure or success of a revolution or of the revolutionaries may actually better be explained by strong foreign influence. Indeed one of the most important outcomes of revolution is the impact on the international system.

Finally, it could be argued that revolutions to some extent bring “new blood” (e.g., political and economic capabilities) to the state. The destructive forces normally brought about by a revolution tear down obstacles which may have been holding back potentially valuable human resources for a long time. However such fruits of a revolution are normally reaped only years (even decades) after the fall of the old regime and it is far from clear whether the old regime – if still intact at that point – could not have produced the same or even better results.

A model of the revolutionary process

To illustrate how the different clusters of theories may relate to the revolutionary process I will compare the revolutionary process to the process of falling ill. There are good reasons to believe structural theories are especially useful when it comes to explaining why

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14 At least in the great revolutions the ideologies which played a crucial role in undermining the old regimes were initially universalistic rather than nationalistic.
revolutions occur. A certain structure increases the possibility of a revolution just like certain genes may increase the possibility of getting a certain sickness. In both cases it is probably not true that structure or genes can be attributed as the only cause of the phenomenon in question. On the other hand it seems unlikely that revolutions or certain diseases could be triggered without some kind of predisposition. To explain why dissimilarities may show right from the start in otherwise similar cases it is necessary to look closer at the culture in which the state exists.

If a country has experienced a revolution in the past it is likely that event will be used for propagandistic aims which might have an effect on other factors crucial to the outbreak and the development of the revolution. In the study of medicine the same phenomenon can be observed when it comes to the outbreak and development of certain diseases. The odds of getting a certain disease might vary considerably depending on if a person has experienced the same or some other disease in the past. In other words a patient’s medical history is far from insignificant when it comes to the outbreak and development of a disease.

After the outbreak of a revolution it is of great interest how key agents react to the political situation. Even though I think the main reasons why a revolution occurs are structural and cultural factors, it is not possible to exclude the possibility of agents playing an independent role when a revolution is unleashed. However I think agents are restrained by structural patterns to a higher degree before than after the outbreak of the revolution. To put it differently: the role of agents is of greater importance when the political structures are weak, but of lesser importance when structures are strong. The same could be said about how a person reacts to an illness. The main reasons why a person gets sick might be due to genetic causes and his or her medical history but surely one cannot exclude that actions also explain why we get sick. How we behave may play a subordinated role to why we get sick but how we react to our sickness is of great importance when it comes to how the sickness develops.

One can never leave out mere chance when analyzing the process of revolutions or sickness. But just like agents mainly affect how revolutions unfold, I think contingency plays its greatest role when the political system is most vulnerable. As long as the old regime is strong it may very well be able to manage a failed crop, the outbreak of a plague, a natural catastrophe and so forth, but when the old regime is weak some factors due to contingency may trigger a revolution. The fall of the old regime might cause – at
least a partial – political vacuum. Contingency may play its greatest role during the time when a new political power structure is crystallizing. Some political agents may simply be more lucky than others. Again, an analogy to medicine seems possible. What triggers a sickness may ultimately be explained by chance but chance itself plays a perhaps more important role when it comes to how a sickness develops. The condition of a person suffering from a disease may improve or worsen due to contingency.

During the last stage of both the revolutionary and the sickness processes a “healing” takes place. In the state which is undergoing a revolution new structures start to emerge and the major events of the earlier stages of the process are incorporated and synchronized with the predominate culture. Still factors regarding agents and contingency are important, but nevertheless reduced because of the cementation of the new political regime. Just like the new political regime can neutralize unexpected outcomes or hostile agents, a healthy body can adapt to new living conditions.

The revolutionary process

![Diagram of the revolutionary process]

**Fig. 5.** The revolutionary process consist of three different stages (cause, unfolding and outcome). Different clusters of revolutionary theories have different explanatory power in different stages of the revolutionary process. Theories concerning structure and culture are particularly helpful when analyzing the causes and outcomes of revolutions. Theories concerning agency and contingency are on the other hand especially useful when
analyzing how the revolutionary process unfolds. The different clusters of theories coalesce during the climax of the unfolding. This episode can theoretically be seen as the collapse of the old regime.

A CLINICAL THEORY

Theoretical assumptions

So far I have discussed the major questions and theories in revolutionary studies. In the last part of this article I will show how the different theoretical clusters coalesce in a relatively unexplored theoretical field. I will further argue the best way of exploring this area is to modify the theoretical insights of the First Generation. This can be done by combining the theoretical foundation of the First Generation theories with the use of anthropological tools.

In Figure 5 I illustrate how the different clusters of theories coalesce during the unfolding of the revolutionary process. I further suggest that the junction of the theories is the point where the old regime collapses. That is to say; during the collapse of the old regime all the discussed theories work equally well (or bad) when analyzing what happens during that particular episode. I suggest the fall of the old regime is best analyzed with a method essentially different from all the other sequences of the revolutionary process. To make my argument more clear certain theoretical assumptions needs to be clarified.

My first assumption is that the collapse of the old regime manifests itself in an event which can be spatially and temporarily more clearly separated from the rest of the revolutionary process. Both the causes and the outcome of a revolution are long-range phenomena. This means factors which may have contributed to the outbreak or the outcome of a revolution can be traced back to different locations and points in time. Moreover the interactions of such factors are highly complex. Therefore one cannot say the main cause or the main outcome in a revolution happened in a certain place at a certain time. The collapse

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15 I suggest a difference between the de jure and de facto collapse of the old regime. The de jure collapse is the symbolic date when the old regime is dethroned. The de facto collapse normally occurs some time before the official collapse of the old regime. Hence the unfolding of the revolutionary process begins prior to the de jure collapse which is the point that marks the climax of the revolutionary process.
of the old regime on the other hand takes place in a certain place at a certain time. Whatever caused it and whatever consequences it may have had does not change the fact that the old regime ceased to exist at some point in time.

My second assumption is that the collapse of the old regime constitutes a certain dynamic which primarily is not best understood by what caused it but by its own *raison d’être*. Groups of people may react to certain stimuli similarly regardless time and space. As has been argued by many scholars there are great similarities between how people react during revolutions. I would like to modify this statement by arguing, there are great similarities between how people react when the old regime collapses during a social revolution. The whole revolutionary process is by itself too extensive spatially and temporally to enable any convincing analysis of how people are affected by a certain revolutionary way of thinking and acting. But identifying the core moment when a clear political shift is inevitable enables a more specific analysis. Indeed I would claim that the violent revolutionary power shift unleashes a collective state of mind which is very rarely found or studied on a macro level.

My third assumption is that the most striking similarities which appears during the collapse of the old regime are social psychological and emotional to their nature. Therefore e.g. rational choice theory may not be very helpful when explaining what happens during this period. The collapse of the old regime releases what the anthropologist Victor Turner called a “social drama” (Thomassen 2012, 684). In the revolutionary drama leaders and followers adopt different roles almost like the drama is prearranged. Only when the roles are cemented more rational structures tend to crystallize. If the assumption is true, a theory focusing on the behavioral aspect can greatly increase the knowledge of why revolutions after the fall of the old regime start to unfold in a certain way. Such a theory nevertheless needs to focus more on how people tend to behave given a certain stimuli than trying to explain the reason for the stimuli.

To summarize: the additional theory I am proposing is based on three assumptions. First, I suggest the moment when the old regime collapses can be defined more closely in spatial and temporal terms than other crucial moments in the revolutionary process. By this I do not mean that the collapse itself can be narrowed down to a particular day in a particular place. I rather mean that the collapse can be defined by a crucial time and a crucial place which creates its own momentum. Second, I suggest the collapse of the old regime creates a dynamic which is inherently different from e.g. the patterns which can
be observed years before the outbreak of a revolution. The collective behavior during the collapse is shaped by archetypical conceptions rather than by political calculations of gain and loss. Third I suggest that the collapse of the old regime can be best analyzed with methods which have normally not been of interest to the revolutionary theorists of social science. Such methods are mainly found in academic fields, like e.g. anthropology, which focus on group behavior and the significance of cultural aspects.\textsuperscript{16}

**A clinical theory**

Strangely enough most theories dealing with the collapse of the old regime are normally overshadowed by attempts either to explain why it happened or what it eventually led to. These theories may be helpful when it comes to analyzing the reactions or impact of the old or the new regime but they are not very helpful when analyzing an emerging new regime. I think the risk of being wise after the event is overwhelming when analyzing social revolutions. When looking back at e.g. the Russian revolution the Bolshevik takeover seems to make perfect sense. One may even be fooled into thinking that any other outcome would have been impossible given the circumstances. Such arguments seem to find support in e.g. resource mobilization theories (who else could at that point in that place mobilize an adequate force to conquer the state power?). Regardless of how convincing these theories may be they are still in most cases convincing only when they are applied \textit{a posteriori}. However, given an \textit{a priori} situation it does not seem clear at all who will end up controlling the state.

A common misconception about revolutions is that the revolutionaries consist of a homogenous group. In fact the opposition is normally extremely heterogeneous (socioeconomically, ideologically, ethnically etc.). It is only a minor group of the opposition who are truly revolutionary. Brinton noted mainly three groups within the opposition: reactionaries, moderates, and radicals (Brinton 1963).\textsuperscript{17} Unlike the radicals, the

\textsuperscript{16} William Sewell sums up some of the advantages he came to discover while using anthropological methods: \textit{“The beauty of cultural anthropology was that it made possible the pursuits of such questions not only in the texts of great thinkers, but in the rituals, conventions, language, and everyday conduct of ordinary people.”} (Sewell 2005, 41).

\textsuperscript{17} Brinton does not exactly use these terms. He makes a somewhat blurred distinction between \textit{“radicals”} and \textit{“extremists”} and he chooses to call those in favor of the old regime \textit{“conservatives”} (Brinton 1963, 87, 122). I think it is sufficient to make a distinction between reactionaries (those who are in the support of the old regime or if the old regime collapses want to restore a political system similar to the one before the collapse),
reactionaries and moderates only wish for minor changes rather than a complete disposal of the old regime. This is not to say the reasons – whatever they may ultimately be – for a growing opposition against the old regime is as disparate as the different aims within the opposition. On the contrary, the dissatisfaction with the old regime may be rooted in the same grievances.

Analyzing the causes why a revolution occurs will therefore not necessary reveal who will replace the old regime. Nor does it seem likely traditional theories focusing on how the revolutionary process unfolds are fully adequate since these theories presuppose information about the strength and the position of agents. Such information cannot exclusively be based on data from the period before the fall of the old regime, since the collapse itself might change the position and strength of agents (some agents might have been killed, new agents inspired by the collapse may have risen from “nowhere”, and so forth).

If it is possible to decode the behavioral patterns which the collapse unleashes it is possible to make predictions about what kind of power structures might crystallize. Such predictions would of course be dependent on other factors as well, but a social psychological framework might be exactly the kind of tool which brings these factors together into a coherent analysis. What I call the clinical theory would be the equivalent of a psychiatric diagnosis which takes into account both the physiological and psychological aspects of a certain disease.

The psychological condition is perhaps best understood as a cause of a physiological condition. Indeed a complex interaction of genes, medical history, unforeseen events and actions intermingle and create a certain psychological state of mind which greatly influences how a patient reacts to his or her environment. In psychiatry these kinds of behaviors are in many cases well documented. For instance a psychiatrist can tell a great deal about what kind of behavior is plausible to manifest in a schizophrenic or a psychotic individual. Hence I view a political revolution as predominately “somatic” while a social revolution is both a ”somatic” and a “psychosomatic” disease.

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the moderates (those who want a changed old regime), and the radicals (those who want a new regime operating in a completely changed political system).
Clinical model of the revolution

Fig. 6. The clinical model of the revolution is based on the dichotomy of pro-regime or anti-regime relations (e.g. a structure can be disintegrating and thereby contributing to the collapse of a regime or integrating and thereby cementing a new regime). In the middle of the model is an asymmetrical shape which illustrates the revolutionary drama, which by no means is equally well analyzed with all the clusters of theories. A distinction is also made between two different aspects of time. Chronological time manifests itself in days, months and years etc. while chairological time manifests itself in different phases of the revolutionary process.

Time is a crucial factor when analyzing a revolution. I suggest it is necessary to make a distinction between the chronological aspect of time and the chairological aspect of time. Both political revolutions and social revolutions undergo the same three phases in a chairological sense but not in a chronological sense. In other words, all revolutions undergo a three staged metamorphose, but not the same type of three-staged metamorphose. The
faster the new regime is consolidated the sooner the revolutionary transformation is over. Indeed a drawn out conflict in the governance of the state is likely to create political turbulence which manifests itself in symptoms different from a fast shift in governance. Hence during a social revolution the fall of the old regime triggers a complex process which profoundly alters cultural and socioeconomic structures, this requires a longer convalescence period.\(^\text{18}\)

A revolution is a sickness which always affects the body (the state) and sometimes even to a significant degree the psyche (the behavior of the people). Thanks to anthropological studies it is possible to know how people in general tend to react when exposed to transformation of a greater magnitude. Indeed, as anthropologists like Bjørn Thomassen have pointed out, analyzing a revolution as a liminal phenomenon brings new aspects of the revolution into light (Thomassen 2012). It is simply not possible to ignore the great similarities in how people in general perceive and react to a revolutionary change. Almost without exception it seems like idealism and fundamentalism appear in every single social revolution. The political doctrines and ideologies born in such times tend to lose their attraction when the party is over. This is exactly the reason why the comparison between a psychiatric sickness and a social revolution works so well. In both cases the ideas produced in an abnormal situation cannot be applied when the situation returns to normal.

I propose that a social revolution is to be analyzed as a sickness which moves through three different stages: (i) the moderate act, (ii) the radical act and (iii) the thermidorian act. The overall idea is that the revolutionary process moves from disintegration to integration. Each phase of the revolution corresponds variably well to the different clusters of theories I have previously discussed. A lot of the confusion in the field of revolutionary theories can be avoided if the difference between a social revolution and a political revolution is conceived of in these terms. So far I have argued that a social revolution is a revolution which moves through all the phases of sickness while a political revolution loses its vitality after some changes in the old regime has occurred. When scrutinizing the different symptoms in social and political revolutions I think one needs to focus on the revolutionary drama, or in other words, how people react during the collapse of the old regime.

\(^\text{18}\) I think Sewell is essentially right when he writes: “Historians have implicit or working theories about social temporality. Moreover, these theories are of considerable subtlety and sophistication, far superior, in my opinion, to the rather clumsy temporal assumptions that plague most theorizing in the social sciences.”(Sewell, 2005). The dual aspect of time which I proposed here might solve some of the clumsiness Sewell rightfully complains about.
Liminality and the revolutionary drama

Thomassen outlines some common ground between revolutionary theories rooted in social sciences and anthropology in his article *Notes towards an Anthropology of Political Revolutions*. Thomassen writes:

My overall point is that modern political revolutions very much resemble rituals and therefore can be profitable studied within a process approach. To study revolutions therefore implies not only a focus on political behavior “from below,” but also recognition of moments at which “high and low” are relativized, made irrelevant, or subverted, and the micro and macro levels fuse in critical conjunctions,”. Anthropologists might have quite a lot to say about exactly those “big events,” those extraordinary moments or situations where existing power configurations crumble and collapse in brief and drastic events (Thomassen 2012, 684).

In my view Thomassen does not acknowledge that political revolutions and social revolutions are not the same thing (see further my distinction between the two in the first part of the article). Further, Thomassen is not specific enough when it comes to defining in which part of the revolutionary process anthropological theories are helpful to the social scientist. These two problems – which I have dealt with in this article – do however not overthrow Thomassens major arguments. Anthropology does indeed offer helpful tools when it comes to analyzing the collapse of the old regime during social revolutions.

The basic point of conceiving the collapse of the old regime as a ritual goes very well together – as Thomassen points out – with Turners concept of liminality. Liminality is in all simplicity a state of confusion which occurs during the middle phase (between the *pre* and *post* conditions) of a ritual (Turner 1969, 94-95). Hence liminality in revolutionary theory would mean the period occurring between the crumbling of the old

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19 In my view a social revolution but not a political revolutions resembles rituals of the kind Thomassen mentions (at least not to the same degree). Perhaps Thomassen’s understanding of a political revolution is the same as my understanding of social revolution. Indeed, Thomassen lists some criteria which indicate this is the case. These criteria are nevertheless not enough to make a clear distinction between different sorts of violent transformations. Such a distinction seems crucial to me if concepts like “liminality” are to be used methodically. Furthermore I do not think Thomassen explains clearly enough why anthropological methods are especially useful when analyzing the unfolding of the revolutionary process (if that is what he means?). To do this he needs to show which areas in the field are covered by fairly good theories and which areas are covered only by rudimental theories. In addition he needs to show how the anthropological method he is proposing can increase our knowledge in the phase of the revolutionary process, which according to him, we lack sufficient knowledge about.

20 According to Thomassen the term “liminality” was actually not introduced by Turner but by Arnold van Gennep in his work *The Rites of Passage* (Thomassen 2012, 687).
regime and the consolidation of the new regime. What is particularly interesting about the term is that it implies exactly the kind of ambiguity or disorientation the First Generation observed in the great revolutions. George Pettee concludes:

Revolutionists enter the limelight, not like men on horseback, as victorious conspirators appearing in the forum, but like fearful children, exploring an empty house, not sure that it is empty. The first feeling is one of relief, universal good feeling that the thing has gone so well. Even the privileged have become so cramped by threats of reform that they share the relief [---] There is no agreement on the content of hope, but there is universal agreement in mood and feeling (Pettee 1971, 101-102).

The mood and the feeling Pettee mentions has been described by Brinton as the beginning of the “honeymoon” period of a revolution (Brinton 1963, 90). According to Brinton the euphoria of the honeymoon is followed by an escalating radicalization which eventually gives way to a Thermidorian reaction (Brinton 1963, 205-207). It is the three-stage movement (moderate act, radical act and thermidorian act) which I think catches the essence of the First Generations theories (Edwards 1927, Brinton 1963, Pettee 1971).

The radicalization phase, analyzed as a liminal phenomenon, is of particular interest when it comes to analyzing the collapse of the old regime. It helps to understand why the political climate is extra fertile to radical ideas and leaders during some time after the disposal of the old regime.

Certain roles tend to appear during the collapse of the old regime. For instance, the archetypical figure of the trickster seems to be one character which normally enters the revolutionary scene at that point. Thomassen writes:

Concerning the role of leadership in liminal moments, it is certainly no coincidence that Turner kept coming back to the figure of the trickster as one of several roles appearing during liminal moments.

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21 The reasons why people in general perceive this phase of the revolution in such terms can be explained in many ways. I think one plausible explanation is the one Selbin gives in his book Revolution, Rebellion, Resistance. To put it briefly Selbin analyzes the revolution as an ongoing story with both regional and global elements which supply people with a certain psychological framework (Selbin 2010). If the revolutionaries have used methods consistent with this framework (e.g. propaganda) the old regime is demonized by the time it collapses. Thus when most people are sure the “tyrant” is gone it awakens feelings of euphoria. The theory of “imitation” may also be important when explaining how certain ideas, imaginings and behaviors are transmitted not only within a revolution but also from one revolution to another (Thomassen 2012, 692-694).

22 The three stage movement described by the First Generation corresponds beautifully to the three different phases Gennep observed in ritual passages: (a) separation, (b) liminality and (c) re-aggregation (Thomassen 2012, 688).

23 As Thomassen notes, Gregory Bateson’s theory of “schismogenesis” can be very helpful when analyzing how violence and radicalization develops during a revolution (Thomassen 2012, 689).
(archetypical?) liminal figures, although he never subjected them to an in-depth analysis. In one of his last essays, “Body, Brain and Culture,” Turner even suggested that the “slippery” tricksters are figures that move between the hemispheres of the brain (1988:170), creating a real effect but erasing their own trace. The analysis of the trickster as a particularly dangerous type of political leader that may emerge in liminal situations, as proposed by Horvath (1998), may well represent a breakthrough in our understanding of how liminal moments or periods may be carried in dangerous directions, Turner himself came close to saying something similar (1985:230) (Thomassen 2012, 697).

It is interesting to note how Thomassen with quotes by both Turner and Horvarth emphasizes the unpleasant and dangerous aspects of the trickster. This notion goes well together with Brintons attempt to analyze the collapse of the old regime as a feverish, almost hallucinatory, condition (Brinton 1963).

From a political science point of view what is perhaps most interesting with archetypical roles like the trickster is what they reveal about the political conditions during the collapse. For instance the tricksters rise to power seems to coincide with the radicalization of the revolution. If this is indeed true then it seems likely the collapse of the old regime creates an extraordinary situation which can easily be exploited by dubious political characters who during normal conditions are excluded from the political scene. Lyford Edwards beautifully summarizes the political climate which brings the trickster to power:

Psychologically, it is ”a new heaven and a new earth”. It is able to effect a complete transformation of the desires, passions, and ideas of those who accept it. It is the most powerful dynamic force which operates in human society, with the two exceptions of hunger and sexual love. It can change a cruel man into a humanitarian and a humane man into a monster of cruelty. It is the power commonly spoken of as “religious conversion” or the “power of salvation”. The social myth is the power of salvation generalized to include many phenomena not commonly spoken of as religious (Edwards 1927, 91).

Political scientists have largely ignored the tremendous social psychological impact of the collapse of the old regime. Indeed, the collapse temporary changes the political parameters allowing – even encouraging – extraordinary solutions to complex problems. The reason for this – I have argued – is not exclusively the problems the old regime has left unsolved
but also a social psychological phenomenon embodied in the revolution. I suggest the expression “revolutionary drama” to describe the temporary but echt revolutionary shift in the sociopolitical parameters.\footnote{It is interesting to note: the revolutionary drama bears great resemblance to how chiliastic movements have operated in history. Indeed the social psychological motives in both cases seem to be essentially the same (Eisenstadt 1978, 175-176).}

Shmuel Eisenstadt noted in his classic work *Revolution and the Transformation of Societies* what he called the “revolutionary Erlebnis”\footnote{Later in the same book Eisenstadt explains in more detail what he means by “Erlebnis”. He concludes: “The combination of these organizational and symbolic [i] return of a golden age, (ii) access to power and social justice (iii) symbols of authority and social hierarchies] aspects of the great modern, pure revolutions sheds light on the phenomenology of the modern revolutionary Erlebnis, of the daily experiences of these revolutions.” (Eisenstadt 1978, 176).} According to Eisenstadt “a recent outgrowth of the natural history approach has been concerned with the revolutionary Erlebnis (experience)” (Eisenstadt 1978, 6). He nevertheless goes on writing:

> The study of the phenomenology of the revolutionary Erlebnis (with the partial exception of John Dunn’s work) has become dissociated from the study of the structural causes and the consequences of revolutions. Likewise, students of the social-psychological preconditions of revolutions (e.g., James Davies and Ted Gurr) have failed not only to link these preconditions to structural aspects of the political and macrosocietal spheres – for example, interelite relations and relations between elites and the broader strata – but also to inquire into the conditions and mechanisms under which such linkages will lead to revolution rather than to other types of social change (Eisenstadt 1978, 7).

To Eisenstadt’s remark I would add that the theory of “Erlebnis” is most useful when analyzing the unfolding of the social revolutionary drama.
The process of a revolutionary drama

My understanding of the unfolding of the social revolution corresponds well to Thomassen’s. According to Thomassen revolutions “take on highly theatrical forms” and “are experienced by involved subjects as extraordinary, liminal moments” (Thomassen 2012, 684). The fact that Thomassen uses the word “experience” resembles Eisenstadt’s concept of Erlebnis (which is normally translated as “lived experience”). At a certain stage a revolution is “lived out” or “acted out” and cannot be reduced to a political game of gain and loss. Thomassen sums it up:

Human action in liminality poses particular challenges that cannot be understood through a rational choice vocabulary: when pushed to the “limit” by the force of events, humans simply cannot take structures for granted. The notion of “interest” or
“rational action” is made obsolete the moment there are no background structures or certainties against which to weigh such “interest” (Thomassen 2012, 699).

The duration of the liminal phase is of great significance when analyzing whether a revolution becomes a full blown social revolution. During a longer absence of a clear structure preserved by the old regime the chances of a revolutionary drama increases. Exactly how the revolutionary drama evolves is difficult to predict since rationality plays a subordinated role to public emotions and imaginations. The best way to analyze how a certain revolutionary drama will evolve is to understand the cultural framework where the drama is acted out. Even though cultural factors may vary greatly from case to case, the revolutionary drama tend to be acted out in a remarkably similar way.26

Why a clinical theory?

The clinical theory is a way of analyzing what kind of regime is likely to emerge after the collapse of the old regime. The theory itself is a meta-theory in the sense that it provides a model in which more established theories – especially agency and cultural theories – might be linked to. The theory rests on the main premise that it is possible to decode how people psychologically react to the collapse of the old regime. Traditionally more interest has been focused on the social psychological mechanism which causes mass demonstrations and protests. This has somewhat overshadowed the similarities in the behavioral patterns which manifested during the collapse of the old regimes in the great revolutions.

A vital part of the clinical theory is the concept of liminality. It is however important to point out that the concept has limitations. Thomassen writes: “[…] liminality is not a concept that could ever explain anything […] to invoke liminality is to recognize that there is no perfect model” (Thomassen 2012, 701). I agree with Thomassen that liminality alone cannot explain anything. However to incorporate liminality in a broader theoretical framework – as I have done – does in fact help a great deal when analyzing and even when making predictions about how a new regime might take shape. Liminality offers the essential requirements for a description of how people in general – regardless of time and space – react to major transformations. After all, humans make up the political system and when the system breaks down more genuine and immediate human reactions come to

26 The same three phase development discussed here can be observed in as culturally different social revolutions as e.g. the Russian, the Cuban and the Iranian revolution.
surface. This kind of proto-political reality is not subordinated to the fairly intelligible laws of politics but to rituals typical to human behavior in traditional societies.

The seemingly intrinsic tendency for revolutions to radicalize has been well known ever since the French revolution. Yet what strikes most people as the most salient similarity has been largely ignored since the days of the First Generation. Later generations of revolutionary theory have instead seen the major contribution of the First Generation as a sequential description of a full blown great revolution. This is to ignore the deep social psychological insights – especially regarding “revolutionary fever” – made by the pioneers in the field.

It is interesting to note how Goldstone writes in an article in *World Politics* 1980:

The first generation, falling roughly between 1900 and 1940, and including the work of LeBon, Ellwood, Sorokin, Edwards, Lederer, Pettee, and Brinton, carefully investigated the patterns of events found in revolutions, but lacked a broad theoretical perspective[…](Goldstone 1980, 425).

Later in his theoretical work from 2003, *Revolutions Theoretical, Comparative, and Historical Studies*, Goldstone only mentions the last three theorists (Edwards, Pettee, and Brinton) as representatives of the First Generation. This fits very well with the notion that the First Generation’s main contribution is the “law like empirical generalizations” they made (Goldstone 2003, 2). But looking closer at the works Goldstone mentions in his 1980 article one can clearly see that their ambition was equally rooted in their often overlooked social psychological observations. Indeed some of these observations survived to the Second Generation where they were modified and incorporated into the aggregated psychological theories. Nevertheless their observations about how the revolutionary behavior was shaped and transformed after the collapse of the old regime were largely forgotten. An example of such an observation can be taken from Pitirim Sorokin’s *The Sociology of Revolution*:

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27 The works of the three mentioned theorists can be studied as a synoptic totality which is clearly not the case with the other mentioned theorists (Lindholm 2012, 13-14). Goldstone’s remark is strictly speaking not wrong since the overlooked dimension of the revolution I (and obviously Thomassen too) want to bring into light also forms a pattern (let alone a more subtle pattern than the ones I suppose Goldstone is referring to). Thomassen rightly concludes “We have to study such moments as real instances of contingency, moments where meaning-formation and symbolism condense and take new forms. That is far from saying that there are no recognizable patterns in political revolutions.” (Thomassen 2012, 702).
Before the revolution nationalism and national feeling were but very slightly developed in Russia [---] On the other hand, the ideology of “Internationalism” and the “Internationale” were very popular. But 1920 was the turning point. Now all ideologies of “Internationalism” and the “Internationale” are absolutely discredited. All the classes of society are caught up in a great national feeling. “Nationalism,” “National Principles and Traditions,” such nowadays are the most popular catchwords in Russia [---] “Cubism,” “Futurism”, “Super-Futurism,” and other extreme schools of art which joined hands with the Bolshevik from the beginning of the revolution have also lost popularity and been replaced by other diametrically opposed tendencies (Sorokin 1976, 357, 358-359).

I think descriptions like these have a greater theoretical implication than has previously been noticed. Indeed they seem to reveal patterns of typical human reactions to a revolutionary change.

These reactions do often take form as a symbolic or ritualistic manifestation such as changing names attached to public places, the destroying statues (and other symbols of the old regime), public courts and executions, dramatic changes in the public view of art, etc. Manifestations like these offer a clear insight into the revolutionary drama taking place during the social revolution. The First Generation knew this but their discoveries were of little importance concerning the aim of the later generations. It is interesting to note how largely the same faith struck the early mavericks in anthropology who showed interest in revolutions and liminality (Thomassen 2012, 702).

The clinical theory offered here is a way to reconnect the overlooked discoveries of the First Generation with the latest discoveries of the Fourth Generation. Like the theories of the First Generation the clinical theory does not primarily aim at explaining but rather at describing the unfolding of the revolutionary process. However, given the important insights of the Second, Third, and Fourth Generations such a description comes very close to a medical diagnosis which enables at least rough predictions.

When such predictions are made a closer analysis of the revolutionary drama seems fruitful. For instance, shortly after the collapse of the old regime political agents most likely try to distance themselves from the old regime because it symbolizes tyranny. If the transitional regime on the other hand makes no visible progress a counter revolutionary
movement might come to symbolize order and stability. The point is that during the initial phase radicalism is more likely and during the latter phase a Thermidorian reaction is more likely. Such a tendency may however not be as much rooted in actual failure or success by the political agents as in the social psychological drama of revolution itself. As the writer of the book of Ecclesiastes puts it “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build.”

CONCLUSION

Explanations why revolutions occur have been predominant in the revolutionary theory since the end of the First Generation. The emerging Fourth Generation has nevertheless argued for a more nuanced view. The core insight is that a revolution is a process rooted in a complex combination of causes which may unfold in many different ways depending on various factors. Thus revolutionary theory today is a complex field where no single theory is likely to shed light on more than a particular phase of the revolutionary process. Following the steps of the First Generation I characterize a revolution as a sickness manifesting itself in both physiological and psychological symptoms. By using the anthropological concept of liminality I argue the latter can be scrutinized. Of special interest is the fall of the old regime which constitutes a social psychological condition which tends to manifest in remarkably similar ways regardless of time and space. Knowing these patterns makes e.g. predictions about how different key agents might respond to the collapse of the old regime more accurate. The clinical theory offered here is an attempt to combine the core ideas of the First Generation with the emerging Fourth Generation.

28 I find Turner’s theory of “communitas” especially interesting regarding how power structures emerge after the collapse of the old regime. Turner writes: “Essentially, communitas is a relationship between concrete, historical, idiosyncratic individuals. These individuals are not segmentalized into roles and statuses but confront one another rather in the manner of Martin Buber’s “I and Thou” […] Ideological communitas is at once an attempt to describe the external and visible effects – the outward form, it might be said – of an inward experience of existential communitas, and to spell out the optimal social conditions under which such experiences might be expected to flourish and multiply.” (Turner 1969, 132).

29 The basic idea of the revolutionary drama fits well with the original meaning of the word “revolution”. In a sense the revolutionary sequences described by the First Generation are a way of saying a great revolution is a cycle which eventually leads to a political situation which is quite similar to the starting point.
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