

Within and Beyond the 'Fourth Generation' of Revolutionary Theory

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Recent years have seen renewed interest in the study of revolutions. Yet the burgeoning interest in revolutionary events has not been matched by a comparable interest in the development of revolutionary theory. For the most part, empirical studies of revolutions remain contained within the parameters established by the 'fourth generation' of revolutionary theory. This body of work sees revolutions as conjunctural amalgams of systemic crisis, structural opening, and collective action, which arise from the intersection of international, economic, political, and symbolic factors. Despite the promise of this approach, this article argues that fourth generation scholarship remains an unfulfilled agenda. The aim of this article is to work within – and beyond – fourth generation theory in order to establish the theoretical foundations that can underpin contemporary work on revolutions. It does so in three ways: first, by promoting a shift from an attributional to a processual ontology; second, by advocating a relational rather than substantialist account of social action; and third, by fostering an approach that sees revolutions as inter-societal 'all the way down'.

The (unfulfilled) promise of fourth generation theory²

Recent years have seen renewed interest in the study of revolution (e.g. Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; Goldstone 2011, 2014; Nepstad 2011; Beck 2011, 2014, 2015; Colgan, 2012, 2013; Weyland 2012; Beissinger 2014; Lawson 2015a and 2015b; Ritter 2015). Spurred by events such as the 2011 uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East, the Maidan movement in Ukraine, and Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement, these studies have largely sought to analyze contemporary protest movements from within the framework established by 'fourth generation' approaches to revolution (Foran 1993; Goldstone 2001). Fourth generation approaches see revolutions as conjunctural amalgams of systemic crisis, structural opening, and collective action, which arise from an intersection of international, economic, political, and symbolic factors (Foran 1993: 10-17; Goldstone 2001: 175-6; Lawson 2004: 70-6; Ritter 2015: 12). Although, as highlighted below, such an approach offers a number of improvements on previous generations of revolutionary theory, this article argues that fourth generation accounts remain an unfulfilled agenda. In many respects, rather than provide a new theoretical foundation for the study of revolutions, fourth generation approaches have been 'additive' in terms of the factors they survey and the universe of cases they examine (Foran 1993: 17). The aim of this article is to extend the insights offered by fourth generation approaches in order to provide more robust theoretical foundations for the study of contemporary revolutionary episodes.

The argument unfolds in three main sections. First, the article unpacks four generations of revolutionary theory. The idea that there has been a generational evolution in the study of revolution can foster an overly tidy picture of the development of revolutionary theory, and uproot twentieth and twenty-first century approaches from their classical heritages. Yet there are two benefits to thinking in generational terms: first, it works as a heuristic device by which to parse theories of revolution; and second, it helps to illuminate the build-up of a self-conscious canon in the study of revolutions. In the second section, 'fourth generation' approaches to revolutionary theory are both critiqued and extended through the development of an understanding of revolutions as

² Thanks to Colin Beck and Daniel Ritter for stimulating discussions about many of the points raised in this article. Thanks also to the anonymous reviewers and editorial team at *Sociological Theory* for their perceptive comments on an earlier version of the article. It is much improved as a result.

processual, relational, and inter-societal. Such an understanding of revolution, it is argued, is immanent within many fourth generation accounts, yet remains a project to be realized. A brief conclusion lays out the benefits that arise from this move.

Four generations of revolutionary theory

To date, there have been four main generations in the study of revolutions. The first is associated with figures like George Pettee (1938), Crane Brinton (1965/1938), and Pitirim Sorokin (1925). These scholars, many of them historians, were often critical of revolution. Brinton, for example, considered revolutions to be analogous to a fever. For Brinton, the initial symptoms of a revolution, which could take generations to gestate, stemmed from a loss of confidence within the old regime as a result of rising expectations within the general population (itself the product of economic development), the emergence of new political ideologies (particularly within the intelligentsia), and the intensification of social tensions (which he associated with physical ‘cramps’). Next, Brinton argued, a revolutionary force challenged the old regime. A revolutionary crisis emerged, with ‘dual power’ (from the Russian *dvoevlastie*) as its core feature. This crisis was resolved through the takeover of state power by the revolutionary regime that, although initially moderate, became radicalized both because of its ideological fanaticism and through its struggles with counter-revolutionary forces. The ‘delirium’ of radical extremists within the new regime embarked on a campaign of terror that, ‘like Saturn, devoured its own children’ (Brinton 1965[1938]: 121).³ Delirium was followed by convalescence, illustrated by the stage of Thermidor, a period of calm that Brinton associated with the fall of Robespierre in July 1794 and the end of French revolutionary ‘Terror’. In the long-term, Brinton (1965[1938]: 17) wrote, ‘the fever is over and the patient is himself again, perhaps in some ways strengthened by the experience, immunized at least for a while from a similar attack. But certainly not made over into a new man’.

There are two main weaknesses with Brinton’s account. The first stems from his Parsonian reading of social order in which revolutions are considered to be deviations

³ The comparison stems from a remark by Pierre Vergniaud who, on 13th March 1793, told the National Convention that: ‘It must be feared that the Revolution, like Saturn, will devour its own children one after the other’. Vergniaud was guillotined on 31st October 1793.

from standard settings of system equilibrium. However, revolutions are less irregular fevers that disturb an otherwise consensual social order than processes deeply embedded in broader fields of contention. Revolutions overlap with civil wars, coup d'états, rebellions, and attempts to reform social orders analytically, conceptually, and empirically. First, a number of revolutions in the modern era were preceded or succeeded by civil wars, including those in France, Russia, China, Cuba, Nicaragua, Afghanistan, and Angola. Second, the effects of coup d'états can, on occasion be revolutionary. The Ba'athist coup in Iraq, the putsch against the monarchy led by Muammar Qaddafi in Libya, and the Francoist coup (*golpe*) in Spain set in motion radical economic and political programmes that significantly recast their societies. At the same time, coups have often preceded revolutions: the regime of Fulgencio Batista in Cuba was caught up in several coup attempts during the late 1950s, something that allowed the revolutionary forces led by Fidel Castro to build up support in the eastern highlands before advancing on Cuba's major cities. Third, rebellions are also closely associated with revolutions. Often, disenfranchised groups from slaves to peasants have been in a state of virtually continuous rebellion, taking part in processes that have induced revolutions in a number of states from Haiti to Algeria. Finally, although reform movements are usually seen as distinct from, or as barriers to, revolutions, there are several occasions when reforms by governments have hastened rather than prevented revolution. In eighteenth century France, for example, the programme of limited reform instigated by Louis XVI emboldened the provincial *parlements*, the newly empowered bourgeoisie, and peasants taking part in rural uprisings. As Alexis de Tocqueville (1999[1852]) notes, the weakness of the monarchy was revealed by its reforms, allowing the 'middling' classes of burghers, merchants, and gentry to press for more radical changes. Defeat in the Seven Years War with England, the example of a successful revolution in America, and the growth of new ideas like nationalism coupled with elite fracture in turning reform into revolution. *Contra* Brinton, revolutions exist in relation with, rather than opposition to, other forms of social change.

The second weakness in Brinton's account is his suggestion that all revolutions, or at least all 'great revolutions', follow the same basic sequence: symptoms, cramping, fever, delirium, and convalescence. Although there are causal sequences within revolutions, these are multiple rather than singular in form – there is no essential pathway to which

all instances of revolutions conform. As the next section of this article illustrates, revolutions are confluences of events that are historically specific, but which share certain causal configurations.

After World War Two, a second generation of revolutionary theorists emerged, many of whose proponents sought to explain the relationship between modernization and uprisings in the Third World. These scholars, among them James Davies (1962) and Ted Gurr (1970), argued that, during periods of modernization, public expectations rose alongside an expansion in social, economic, and political opportunities. Davies (1962: 52) observed that an initial period of rapid growth associated with modernization was followed by an economic downturn, a process he labeled: the 'J-Curve'. The J-Curve fostered increased levels of public frustration as anticipated notions of material progress failed to take place. Ted Gurr (1970: 13) reconceptualized this process as 'relative deprivation' – the gap between what people expected to get and what they actually received.⁴ For Gurr, unrealized *aspirations* were disappointing, yet tolerable; unrealized *expectations* – the false hopes bought about by exposure to new ways of life and ideas, and an awareness of the paucity of one's situation compared to others – were intolerable. In this way, the discrepancy between individual's sense of entitlement and their substantive capacity to achieve these goals generated value discontent that, ultimately, became actualized in revolutionary uprisings. For both Davies and Gurr, the frustration and aggression that resulted from relative deprivation formed the basis for revolutions to take place.

Although second generation approaches offered some insights into why people revolt, they had much less to say about how, where, and under what circumstances they were likely to do so. Modernization on its own has no necessary link to revolution – some 'modernizing' states have avoided revolution (such as India, Canada, and Brazil), while others accompany modernization with a strengthening in autocracy (as in today's Gulf states). At the same time, as Theda Skocpol (1979: 34) queried: 'what society ... lacks widespread relative deprivation of one sort or another'? As a concept, relative deprivation appears so general that it can apply to all cases of revolution, as well as

⁴ Although Gurr is widely associated with the term 'relative deprivation', it first appears in the work of W.G. Runciman (1966).

large numbers of societies where revolutions do not take place. Often, advocates failed to connect the concept to other factors that make up revolutions: the role played by the state's coercive apparatus, the degree of fracture within a ruling elite, the role of a revolutionary party in organizing and mobilizing protest, and so on. On its own, relative deprivation says something about the basic underpinnings of dissatisfaction, but little about how this is transformed into a revolutionary uprising. Rod Aya (1990: 23) summarizes this shortcoming effectively: 'grievances no more explain revolutions than oxygen explains fires'.

A third generation of revolutionary theory emerged in response to the shortcomings of second-generation theorists. These 'structuralists', including Barrington Moore Jr. (1967), Eric Wolf (1969), Theda Skocpol (1979), and Jack Goldstone (1991) saw revolutions as determined by the emergence of particular structural alignments. Revolutions took place, succeeded, or failed according to certain macro-conditions: responses by the bourgeoisie and the peasantry to the commercialization of agriculture (Moore 1967); the role of 'middle peasants' in turning local forms of unrest into revolutionary uprisings (Wolf 1969); state crisis emanating from international conflict and elite fracture (Skocpol 1979); and demographic changes that destabilized social orders by placing pressures on state coffers, thereby weakening the legitimacy of governments and generating new forms of intra-elite competition (Goldstone 1991). These theorists also incorporated international factors – uneven capitalist development, military conflict, and patterns of migration – into their accounts. Overall, the right combination of international and domestic factors served as the proximate causes of revolution.

The main difficulty with third-generation approaches was that its advocates were ill-equipped to explain how revolutions were made in unpromising circumstances and why revolutions did not occur when the right structural conditions were in place. As John Foran (2005: 12) notes, when explaining actual instances of revolution, agency, contingency, political culture, ideology, values, and beliefs 'slipped in through the back

door' of third generation explanations.⁵ As a result, analysis of revolution, partly rooted in the need to explain multi-class revolutions in Iran and Afghanistan mobilized, at least in part, by religious sentiment, awakened interest in how ideology and political culture shaped revolutionary mobilization. Theorists began to look beyond accounts of 'efficient causation' towards causal chains and sequences. John Foran (2005: 18-23; also see 1993: 13-14), for example, argued that revolutions in the Third World emerged from the intersection of five sequential causal conditions: dependent state development, which exacerbated social tensions; repressive, exclusionary, personalist regimes, which polarized opposition; political cultures of resistance, which legitimized revolutionary opposition; an economic downturn, which acted as the 'final straw' in radicalizing opposition; and a 'world-systemic opening', which acted as a 'let-up' of external constraints. For Foran (2005: 203), 'political fragmentation and polarization, economic difficulties, and outside intervention occur together in mutually reinforcing fashion'.

Foran's study, along with those of Parsa (2000), Goldstone (2001, 2003, 2009), Selbin (2010), and others (e.g. Sharman 2002; Sohrabi 2002; Lawson 2004, 2005; Kurzman 2008; Beck 2011, 2014, 2015; Ritter 2015) served as the advent of a fourth-generation of revolutionary scholarship. As noted in the introduction, this scholarship sees revolutions as conjunctural amalgams of systemic crisis, structural opening, and collective action, which arise from the intersection of international, economic, political, and symbolic factors. Jack Goldstone (2001: 172) argues that fourth generation approaches intend not to establish the causes of instability (because there are too many to capture), but to extricate the 'precariousness of stability'. In other words, fourth generation approaches focus on how international factors such as dependent trade relations, the transmission of ideas across borders, and the withdrawal of support by a patron, along with elite disunity, insecure standards of living, and 'unjust' leadership combine to challenge state stability (Goldstone 2003: 77-81). For Goldstone (2001: 173), the range of factors that disturb state legitimacy makes stability 'fundamentally problematic'. And state instability is the necessary precondition for the generation of revolutionary crisis – protests, from secessionist groups to movements for indigenous

⁵ Occasionally they also came in through the front door. Goldstone (1991: 27), for example, noted the ways in which ideology and political culture could both mobilize opposition *and* provide a unifying frame through which regimes could be stabilized.

rights, can be defeated by an entrenched elite and an infrastructurally embedded state. If the state is able to carry out its core functions, if the coercive apparatus stays intact, and if an elite remains both unified and loyal to the regime, successful revolutions cannot take place. In this way, fourth generation revolutionary theory shifts the object of analysis from 'why revolutions take place' to 'under what conditions do states become unstable'?

Assessing fourth generation approaches

Fourth generation scholarship provides several advances on previous generations of study. First, there is recognition that revolutions take place under a myriad of circumstances. As Jack Goldstone (2001: 172) notes:

Analysts of revolution have demonstrated that economic downturns, cultures of rebellion, dependent development, population pressures, colonial or personalistic regime structures, cross class coalitions, the loss of nationalist credentials, military defection, the spread of revolutionary ideology and exemplars, and effective leadership are all plausibly linked within multiple cases of revolution, albeit in different ways in different cases.

For Goldstone (2003: 37), as for other fourth generation theorists, revolutionary diversity means that they are best seen as emergent processes that arise from a multiplicity of causes. This understanding of revolutions as emergent processes rather than static entities is an important amendment to previous generations of scholarship. As this article explores, revolutions are not reducible to finite characteristics, variables, or properties. On the contrary, their meaning, form and character shift according to dynamics rooted in both their local instantiation and broader inter-societal relations. Second, as noted above, fourth generation scholarship recognizes the slippage within many third generation accounts, which tended to rely on *ad hoc* 'agentic' factors, such as decisive leadership and effective coalition-formation, even as these factors were disavowed for the purposes of theory-building. In similar vein, a resurgence of interest in the symbolic features of revolutions, such as the mobilizing potential of revolutionary stories (Selbin 2010), has prompted an 'agentic turn' in the study of revolutions. Finally, many fourth generation approaches have highlighted the necessarily international features of revolutionary change, from issues of dependent development to the impact of revolutions on inter-state conflict.

However, despite these advances, fourth generation scholarship remains an agenda to be fulfilled. None of the moves claimed by fourth generation accounts have, as yet, been fully realized. First, despite claims to the contrary, many fourth generation accounts retain a focus on 'ultimate primacy' (as in Goldstone's focus on 'state stability') or 'indispensible conditions' (as in Foran's study of Third World revolutions). Such studies are more sophisticated than previous accounts of revolutionary change in the range of cases they observe, the number of factors they assess, and the methodological tools they employ. But they remain attached to the same underlying sensibility that bedeviled previous generations of study, seeking to capture revolutions within 'general linear reality' (Abbott 1988; see also Tilly 1995). The result is that, rather than rethink the basis of their theoretical wagers, fourth generation approaches have tended to add more variables and include more cases, producing what Charles Kurzman (2004: 117) calls 'multivariate conjuncturalism'. Second, fourth generation approaches tend to reinforce rather than eliminate the analytic binary between structure and agency, thereby reiterating some of the weaknesses of third generation accounts. And third, fourth generation approaches retain a limited sense of the international as providing either a facilitating context for revolution (e.g. through a focus on uneven development) or as the dependent outcome of revolution (e.g. through a heightening of inter-state competition). As such, they fail to realize the full potential of an inter-societal approach. These three shortcomings are discussed in turn.

Processual ontology

For Andrew Abbott (1988: 170), 'general linear reality' assumes that 'the social world consists of fixed entities (the units of analysis) that have attributes (the variables)'. In this understanding, the interaction of attributes leads to stable patterns; patterns that persist regardless of context. Although they claim to be rejecting such a wager, fourth generation accounts of revolution are often wedded to this notion of revolutions as 'collections of properties'. Indeed, debate within current scholarship tends to center around which properties are essential or contingent to particular revolutions or clusters of revolutions. Jack Goldstone (2009), for example, highlights twelve components of 'color revolutions', which he traces from the revolution of the United Provinces against Spanish rule in the sixteenth century to present day instances in Ukraine and elsewhere.

In his most recent work, Goldstone (2014: 16-19) lists the ‘necessary and sufficient’ conditions that induce an ‘unstable equilibrium’ that, in turn, foster revolutionary situations: fiscal strain, elite alienation, popular anger, ‘shared narratives of resistance’, and ‘favorable international relations’ such as the withdrawal of support for a client regime by its patron. These conditions are generated by a range of causes, from shifting demographic patterns to new patterns of exclusion, which foster social instability and, thereby, act as the ‘fundamental causes of revolutions’ (Goldstone 2014: 21-25). Such analysis, like other fourth generation approaches, contains the ontological assumption that revolutions consist of certain attributes that can be taxonomized (as in Goldstone’s ‘suite’ of factors that comprise ‘color revolutions’) or combined (as in Foran’s Boolean analysis of Third World Revolutions), albeit with due regard, at least in theory, to the complexity of the social world and to variation within revolutionary experiences.

In contrast to this identification of core revolutionary *attributes*, this article sees revolutions as historically specific *processes*. In a strict sense, the diversity of revolutionary instances (as noted by Goldstone in the quote at the beginning of this section) dictates that all explanations are ‘case-specific’ – revolutions are particular assemblages that combine in historically discrete ways. Because the specific processes within which these assemblages cohere is singular and, therefore, historically unrepeatable, the timing of revolutionary events is crucial. For example, reforms by a state within a revolutionary situation may succeed or fail depending on when they take place. If reforms take place sufficiently early, they may decompress revolutionary mobilization (as in Morocco and other monarchies in North Africa and the Middle East in 2011); too late, and they are likely to fail (as in Tunisia and Egypt the same year).⁶ There is, therefore, no single ‘attribute’ that can be associated, measured, or coded in relation to reform attempts by a state during a revolutionary situation. In similar vain, *when* a contentious movement appears is just as important as *how* it is organized. For example, there may be few differences between the organizational capacity of the Syrian opposition that has fought Bashar al-Assad since the 2011 uprising and the movement that toppled Zine Ben Ali in Tunisia in January 2011. If anything, the former has shown a greater capacity to mobilize and sustain its struggle. The latter was successful not because of a set of fixed, timeless attributes, but because it was the *first*

⁶ Jeff Goodwin (2001: 46) calls this the ‘too-little-too-late syndrome’.

such struggle in the region. Oftentimes, revolutionary waves become less successful the further away they travel from their original point of instigation (Beissinger 2007; Patel, Bunce, and Wolchik 2011). This is the case for three reasons: first, revolutionaries in states outside the original onset of the crisis often overstate the possibilities of revolutionary success, placing too much weight on dramatic news from elsewhere and drawing firm conclusions from relatively sparse information (Weyland 2012: 920-4); second, revolutionaries enact their protests in increasingly inhospitable settings – regimes learn quickly, including how to demobilize their challengers (Della Porta and Tarrow 2012: 122); and third, because authoritarian state-society relations do not disappear overnight (Lawson 2005; Way 2011). Such studies indicate that revolutionary scholarship should be concerned less with the *fact* of emergence than with the *timing* of emergence.

Fourth generation approaches to revolution often claim to recognize that revolutions are not static containers composed of fixed attributes. But they do not always sustain this wager in their empirical analysis. The difficulty, as Alexander Motyl (1999: 23) points out, is that revolutions are not ‘tangible’ objects that can be ‘touched’:

Revolutions do not exist as materially tangible 3-D objects, in the sense that we say that rocks and trees and airplanes exist as physical things. We can throw, touch or board the latter, we can use all or some of our senses to comprehend their physical reality, but we cannot do the same for revolutions. We cannot, like homicide investigators, draw a chalk line around a revolution, nor can we place it in an infinitely expandable bag. We cannot touch it, taste it, or for that matter even see it. Naturally many eyewitnesses to revolution claim to have seen it, but in reality what they saw were events and processes and people and things that, together, are called revolutions.

Such an understanding reconceptualizes revolutions as ‘webs of interactions’ whose effects change according to when and where they are instantiated (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001: 13; Tilly 2004: 9). Revolutions take place because of particular constellations of events, ‘not because of a few fundamental effects acting independently’ (Abbott 1992: 68). To this extent, it makes little sense to ask: ‘is “x” a revolution?’ Such an exercise entails the comparison of a processual configuration against an inert checklist of characteristics. But revolutions have no ascribed properties. Nor do they contain fixed attributes. To the contrary, revolutions are sequences of events that attain

their significance as they are threaded together in and through time. To put this in Abbott's terms (1988: 179), revolutions are 'closely related bundles' whose meaning arises from the order and sequence within which their events are knitted together.⁷

If revolutions are assemblages that can be understood only through retrieving their temporally specific configurations, perhaps they are best examined on a case-by-case basis? Such research is certainly valuable in terms of its sensitivity to the multitude of interactions that constitute revolutionary processes. However, this mode of analysis is also guilty of generating what Daniel Little (1995: 52) calls 'combinatorial explosion'. Because there are always contingencies and interactions that go unobserved, there can be no 'total explanation' of revolutionary processes, however micro-level the analysis. If all historical events are overdetermined in that there are more causes than outcomes (Adams 2005: 10), then all analysis of revolutions underdetermines the 'true causal story' *by necessity* (Little 1995: 53; also see Flyvbjerg 2001). Indeed, all theoretical work is an act of foregrounding-suppression that simplifies history and constructs the social world into wagers about 'why this and not that'. Theories denote what is significant and what is insignificant about a cluster of historical events. Attributional accounts carry out this task by testing the weight of causal factors that are taken to be significant. Yet such a wager cannot *eliminate* the effects of the causal factors that lie outside the scope of a particular theory – it simply represses them. In this sense, there can never be theoretical 'closure', particularly given that attributional accounts are particularly unsuited to examining the *interdependence* of 'significant' and 'insignificant' causal processes (Adams 2005: 11-12).

The implication of seeing revolutions as temporally specific assemblages requires a form of analysis in which the researcher amplifies the clusters of events that form revolutions, providing a 'rational reconstruction' of how revolutions begin, endure, and end (Jackson 2011: 38-9). This task is helped by the fact that, even during periods of

⁷ Such an understanding resembles attempts by some previous scholarship (e.g. Goldstone 1991: 31-7) to see causation in revolutions as non-linear, interactive, and multi-scalar. Goldstone (1991: 10-12) argues that different types of political crisis contain combinations of eight elements, ranging from degrees of popular revolt to changes in property ownership. For Goldstone, revolutionary episodes contain a *particular* rather than *essential* combination of these elements.

radical uncertainty like revolutions, social action is not random. Rather, social action is embedded within fields of action that constrain behavior and give meaning to these actions (Flyvbjerg 2001; Fligstein and McAdam 2012). In 'normal times', social orders are relatively stable – they are constituted by fields of action that are patterned in relatively sticky, predictable ways. At the same time, many fields of action – such as gender and class relations – are so deeply embedded that they are resilient to attempts at radical transformation. However, this does not make such fields of action static – there is always a processual dimension to the ways in which they are produced and reproduced. In 'abnormal times', such as revolutions, these processual dynamics have the capacity to reshape fields of action and categories of meaning quite dramatically (Goldstone and Useem 2012: 39, 45). In this way, revolutions can be understood as attempts to break existing fields of action and embed new webs of interaction. This twin process of displacement-replacement occurs in several fields of action – economic, political, symbolic – simultaneously.

Although, therefore, as the above quote from Alexander Motyl (1999: 23) makes clear, it is not possible to 'draw a chalk line around a revolution', it is possible to speak of revolutions as 'events and processes and people and things that, together, are called revolutions'. Such an understanding means arresting the desire to map revolutions in their entirety in favor of discerning the logical shapes within which revolutions cohere. In this sense, it is helpful to see revolutions as traffic jams rather than solar eclipses (Tilly 1993: 7). Whereas the latter are the result of regular celestial motion that follow a precise schedule under stable conditions, the former vary in form and severity, and develop for a number of reasons. This does not mean that there are no regularities to traffic jams. They are linked to rush hours, bad weather, roadworks, traffic light sequencing, breakdowns, accidents, and so on (Tilly 1993: 7). Although there can be no equivalent to predicting solar eclipses from these factors (for example, bad weather may or may not lead to a traffic jam), the combination in which these factors arise yields recurrent patterns. Like traffic jams, revolutions are, at least in part, stable accumulations of interactions. They contain situational logics, which emerge as events and experiences cohere to form meaningful fields of action. These fields of action are exposed through the construction of 'analytical narratives' that filter revolutionary events into idealized causal pathways. Analytical narratives are 'structured stories

about coherent sequences of motivated actions' (Aminzade 1992: 457-8). They are interpretative to the extent that they identify connections that are taken to be meaningful (Reed 2011: 162). They are also tools of simplification in that they emphasize certain sequences of events and downplay others. But analytical narratives are also systematically constructed and logically coherent, providing a means of differentiation between significant and accidental causal configurations, and producing useful insights into concrete instances of revolutionary change (Jackson 2010: 193). Such analysis realizes the hitherto untapped processual impulse of fourth generation revolutionary theory.

The realization of the processual ontology favored, but not actualized, by fourth generation revolutionary theory leads, in turn, to a configurational account of causation.⁸ As particular bundles of events, both the sequence within which revolutions take place and the context within which they occur, are significant – causal regularities emerge contextually, constituting configurations that are robust, but situational. Although causal configurations are contextually located, they constitute relatively stable sites for examining the emergence, durability, and outcomes of revolutions. As William Sewell (1996) notes, all revolutionary events are part of broader chains of events. These chains of events have cascading effects in that they both break and reproduce existing social formations – they are 'sequences of occurrences that result in the transformation of structures' (Sewell 2005: 227; also see: Mahoney and Schensul 2006).⁹ Because they transform fields of action, events are theorizable categories. Sewell uses the example of the fall of the Bastille to illustrate this point. The importance of the storming of the Bastille on 14th July 1789 was that it was imbued with significance 'beyond itself'. In

⁸ Some caution is needed here. Some fourth generation accounts *do* employ aspects of both a processual ontology and configurational causation. The Boolean approach employed by Foran (2005), for example, could be considered configurational by virtue of its stress on the interaction of five causal factors, and processual by virtue of its focus on temporal sequence. This reinforces the point that this article works within, as well as beyond, fourth generation revolutionary theory. My thanks to an anonymous referee for reinforcing this point.

⁹ There are some overlaps between the approach advocated here and historical institutionalism. In line with historical institutionalism (e.g. Mahoney and Thelen eds. 2010), this article shares an interest in sequence, temporality, and context. However, unlike historical institutionalism, the article makes no specific wager regarding institutions as mechanisms for the translation of actions into outcomes.

other words, the event contained recognition within broader political and symbolic fields, which broke existing configurations and reconstructed categories of meaning, amongst them notions of 'people' and 'revolution'. A specific event had cascading effects in that it both challenged existing symbolic repertoires and helped to reformulate categories of meaning – it was a rupture that assumed 'authoritative sanction' (Sewell 2005: 257). Processes like the fall of the Bastille in particular, and revolutions in general, illuminate the ways in which moments of temporal heterogeneity morph into common fields of 'ruptural unity' as social facts are disrupted and transformed (Steinmetz 2011; also see Tarrow 2012: 124). Configurational causal accounts permit researchers to assess the ways in which *historical* events enable *social* formations to break down and re-emerge.

Events like the fall of the Bastille, therefore, have outcomes that can be traced through the ways in which sequences of 'happenings' are casually conjoined. This process of 'eventing' sees historical events as assuming relatively stable shape through the interactions between 'happenings' and the fields of action within which they are nested (Jackson 2006). Such a move is never complete – alternative readings are always available and always present. But if all theoretical work requires the simplification of historical 'mess' into plausible causal stories (Tilly 2006), then analytical narratives of revolution are no exception to this in that they are tools by which to assemble historical clutter into significant 'plots'. These plots assess the transformation of patterned social relations in and through time. The result is a sense of 'followability' to dynamics of revolution: a 'narrative intelligibility' in which events are connected to accounts of sequence and order (Gallie 1964).

Such an understanding of revolutions begins to fulfill the promise of fourth generation approaches to revolution. Current scholarship tends to be caught in a bind: accepting the multiplicity of revolutionary episodes, while retaining an 'attributional' ontology that requires revolutions to fulfill certain elemental conditions. However, identification of the context-specific interactions that constitute revolutionary processes generates a dual benefit: intimate knowledge of concrete revolutionary episodes *and* understanding of how revolutions are sedimented within wider fields of action (Flyvbjerg 2001; Fligstein and McAdam 2012). In this understanding of revolution, the tasks of the

researcher are fourfold: first, to examine the particular sequences through which revolutions are 'evented'; second, to assemble these sequences into plausible analytical narratives that are logically coherent and supported by the available evidence; third, to abstract the causal configurations through which revolutions displace-replace fields of action; and fourth, to assess the ways in which these causal configurations explain revolutions in diverse settings (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001: 13; Tilly 2004: 9). This mode of research tacks between empirical and theoretical registers, while being sensitive both to the temporally singular character of revolutions and the possibility of generating insights beyond specific revolutionary episodes. The first step in fulfilling the promise of fourth generation revolutionary theory lies in the development of a processual ontology that, in turn, leads to a commitment to configurational causation.

Relational social action

The second step in fulfilling the promise of fourth generation approaches is to move beyond the 'analytical bifurcation' (Go 2013) that is often drawn, explicitly or implicitly, between structural preconditions and strategic action. Although fourth generation approaches usually claim to be doing just this, there remains a sense in which culture, ideology, and leadership are grafted onto structural preconditions in order to generate a 'complete explanation' (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001: 196; Sharman 2002: 1). For example, Misagh Parsa's (2000: 12, 25, 279) 'synthetic' account of the Iranian revolution focuses on the structural vulnerability of the Shah's regime and the ways in which a 'hyperactive state' politicized market interactions. At the same time, the dependency of the Iranian state on foreign backers, most notably the United States, along with elite fracture as the patronage system of the Shah weakened, 'set the stage' within which various groups, from clerics to bazaaris, acted (Parsa 2000: 7, 21). In Parsa's account, therefore, 'state vulnerability' provided the structural precondition for the emergence of a revolutionary situation. Once this precondition was established, 'additional variables', ranging from the formation of opposition coalitions to the mobilization of collective sentiment, explained the timing of the revolution (Parsa 2000: 7, 25). Such a dichotomy – empirically present, if theoretically disavowed – is a regular feature of fourth generation accounts.

This tendency towards analytical bifurcation is problematic in that it reinforces two, equally unsatisfactory, myths: agent-centric theory builds on the myth of the person as a pre-existing entity, while structural accounts build on the myth of society as a pre-existing entity. To put this another way, whereas a focus on structure tends to reify relatively fixed patterns of social relations as ‘things with essences’, an emphasis on agency imagines a pre-existing, asocial individual whose motivations, interests, and preferences come pre-packaged without recourse to broader fields of action. Both positions are unsatisfactory. Indeed, both rest on an assumption that their basic units of analysis are static, whether this assumes the form of an inter-state system, a class, or a volitional subject. However, objects of analysis such as revolutions are not static containers that contain essential traits. As a result, analysis of revolutions cannot assume the stability of a set of universal factors that are easily transplanted to diverse settings. Rather, analytical priority must be given to the ways in which relations between social sites *constitute* revolutionary dynamics. All social structures are relatively fixed configurations of social action, just as all social action takes place within relatively fixed configurations of social ties. There is no non-structured action that is free from broader ties, connections, patterns, and interrelations (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1996: 364; Fligstein and McAdam 2012: 48-9). Social life takes place in ‘structured contexts of action’ (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1996: 372) – fields of practice formed by configurations of events and experiences. Extending fourth generational accounts requires moving beyond binaries of structure and agency towards a relational approach that conceptualizes social action as taking place within these broader configurations. Revolutions are formed through the constitutive interaction of ‘entities-in-motion’.

This point is made clearer by differentiating between entities and entities-in-motion (Go and Lawson 2016). Entities are the subject of ‘substantialist’ approaches, which see the basic units of enquiry as fixed substances, whether these substances are things (such as revolutions), people (as in expected utility models), or systems (as in world systems analysis, which parses a single global structure into core, peripheral, and semi-peripheral polities, each of which is defined through a set of essential attributes). In substantialist thought, entities contain a finite set of core attributes, as in Skocpol’s (1979: 4) understanding of revolutions as the ‘rapid, basic transformations of a society’s

state and class structures, accompanied and in part carried through by class based revolts from below'. Skocpol's definition posits a set of properties that revolutions must be seen to contain. Empirical study takes place within this definitional ambit, examining whether events conform with or challenge these predetermined characteristics. Supplementary work in this idiom either refines Skocpol's definition (as in Goldstone's (2001: 403) differentiation between 'political' and 'social' revolutions) or generates causal claims that flow from the definitional starting point (as in Foran's (2005) analysis of the five essential requirements of Third World revolutions). The study of revolutions tends to see its object of analysis as durable entities possessing essential properties.

The most important problem associated with substantialist thinking is the positing of revolutions as entities that assume a static, unchanging form rather than entities-in-motion that are made in and through time. In this way, substantialist thinking elides the eventfulness of revolutions, fostering a fixed idea of revolutions that weakens the capacity of analysts to capture their changing, configurational quality. The hold of Skocpol's definition, for example, continues to funnel the study of revolution towards a particular view of revolutions associated with the notion of 'total change'. Yet the universe of cases that conforms to such an understanding is, at most, ten: England, Haiti, France, Mexico, Russia, China, Cuba, Vietnam, Nicaragua, and Iran. Even in these cases, it is questionable whether Skocpol's definitional edict can be sustained. If revolutions must be 'rapid', it is difficult to see how China's three-decade long struggle conforms. If revolutions must transform 'state structures', then France does not qualify – republicanism was a relatively short-lived experiment eclipsed first by Napoleonic empire and then by the restoration of the monarchy. If revolutions must both be 'class based revolts from below' and transform 'class structures', then few if any revolutions meet this standard. Revolutions are cross-class coalitions that are bound up in complex dynamics of continuity and change (Dix 1984; Goodwin 2001).

The salient point is not that Skocpol's definition is *particularly* difficult to square with diverse revolutionary experiences. All theories are tools of simplification – their utility arises not from their capacity to explain everything, but from their capacity to generate useful insights into particular domains of social life. The problem is that *any* definition rooted in the attempt to ascribe revolutions with a set of essential characteristics must

by necessity freeze history. Such an exercise not only occludes the empirical subject matter it claims to explain, it also fails to capture the sense in which revolutions are entities-in-motion. The result is the flattening of the social world into a static sphere of pre-existing social formations. Requiring that revolutions fulfill a set of inalienable characteristics distorts understanding of how revolutions change according to historically produced circumstances. For example, many post-Cold War revolutions have distinct trajectories in terms of their rejection of armed confrontation, their embracing of non-violent repertoires, and their fostering of despotically weak states (Lawson 2004, 2005, 2015b). Studies that stay within a substantialist framework cannot easily capture such a shift. Rather, a substantialist baseline will see only conforming or non-conforming parts of a pre-existing script. More fruitful, this article argues, is the adopting of a 'relational' stance that examines the contextually bound, historically situated configurations of events and experiences (Abbott 1998, 2002; Emirbayer 1997; Go and Lawson 2016).

In contrast to substantialism, a relational approach holds that entities 'are not assumed as independent existences anterior to any relation, but ... in and with the relations which are predicated of them' (Cassirer 1953: 36; also see Emirbayer 1997: 287). Rather than presuming that there is an abstract essence to revolutions, or an essential set of properties that revolutions must contain, a relational approach gives analytic priority to the historically located events and sequences through which causal sequences within revolutions emerge. Unlike substantialist accounts, a relational approach does not ascribe necessary conditions under which revolutions will arise (e.g. Goldstone 2014).¹⁰ Nor does it seek to generate covering laws within which specific episodes of revolutions can be tested and coded (e.g. Foran 2005). Rather, a relational approach seeks to dissolve the binaries that limit effective analysis of the changing form that revolutions assume over time and place. The difference is akin to taking a photograph or shooting a film. Substantialist approaches attempt the former, holding certain conditions constant by taking a snapshot of a particular moment in time, then testing the generalizability of this snapshot to other instances of the phenomena in question. Relational approaches

¹⁰ At times, Goldstone (2004) endorses a relational approach to contentious politics, arguing that social movements must be studied not by reference to necessary and sufficient conditions, but via the ways in which such movements are embedded within wider 'external fields'.

favor the latter, seeing social reality as a moving spectacle that requires analytics to be adjusted to changing conditions. In this latter understanding, the character of social objects cannot be assumed as if the subject of enquiry lay elsewhere. Rather, the particular forms that entities-in-motion assume *is* the subject of enquiry.

Relational approaches therefore examine the ways in which historical events are generative of how social formations emerge, reproduce, transform and, potentially, breakdown. As noted in the previous section, in revolutions, as in other domains of social life, social action is connected through ‘webs of interactions’. These ‘webs of interaction’ produce relatively fixed patterns of enduring interactions. Although such patterns are open to contestation, they constitute stable sites for the development of empirical enquiry. Just as sequences of revolutionary events can be logically connected through a processual ontology, so too can social action be usefully examined as it accumulates in particular assemblages (Latour 2005: 25-8; Go 2013: 43). By focusing on instances of change – what Michael Mann (1986) calls ‘neo-episodic moments’ – it is possible to assess the ways in which patterns of social relations are disrupted and transformed. Sometimes, this transformation is overtly coercive: in France, more than one million people died in the revolution and the wars that followed; in Cambodia, nearly a third of the population died in violence following the seizure of power by the Khmer Rouge (Goldstone 2014: 40). At other time, it is aimed at deepening the infrastructural power of the state. The French revolutionary regime transformed provinces into webs of départements, districts, cantons, and communes. It also used symbols, images, and rituals such as festivals as a means by which to socialize populations into the revolutionary ideal (Ozouf 1991). Such socialization even extends to spheres as apparently humdrum as holidays. In Cuba, for instance, the figure of Don Feliciano came to replace the Christmas Tree and Santa Claus (Paige 2003: 24).

The contrast between attributional and relational approaches is stark. The former sees the purpose of theorizing about revolutions as: a) the identification of attributes that are necessary and/or sufficient to revolutions; and b) a comparison of these attributes to a range of apparently distinct cases. In other words, attributional approaches study the cross-case variation between a number of apparently independent casual factors. Relational approaches, in contrast, examine the bundles of patterns, sequences, and

assemblages that constitute revolutionary episodes. The focus is on interdependent rather than independent causal dynamics, such as those that connect the Haitian and French revolutions with insurgencies in Asia, Africa, and the Arabian Gulf (Anderson 2013). Although the social objects created by such processes are necessarily entities-in-motion, and despite the diversity of revolutionary episodes, comparable mechanisms can be observed in discrete historical cases: the polarization of adversaries into opposing factions; the role played by brokers in unifying disparate opposition groups; the decertification of the regime by key elites, and so on.¹¹ In identifying these mechanisms, the question is not *whether or not* a certain condition enables a particular effect, but *how* an effect comes to be possible through a particular assemblage of events and experiences (Hedström and Bearman 2009). Revolutions may not have uniform structures, but they do have shared forms (Thomassen 2012: 684).

An inter-societal approach

The third way in which the promise of fourth generation approaches remains unrealized is in its failure to generate a fully fleshed-out ‘inter-societal’ approach.¹² The term ‘inter-societal’ is not intended to mean that the objects of analysis must be ‘societies’. Rather, it is concerned with examining the relationship between ‘external’ and ‘internal’ dynamics wherever these are found: in ideas that cross borders, amongst networks of revolutionary actors, in asymmetrical market interactions, and more. An inter-societal approach is concerned with the ways in which differentially located, but interactively engaged, social sites affect the development of revolutions without containing a prior presumption of what these social sites are.

Both third and fourth generation theorists often claimed to have sufficiently incorporated the international aspects of revolutions into their analyses. In response to the relative neglect of international factors by first and second generation work, beginning in the 1970s, third generation theorists (e.g. Goldfrank 1979; Skocpol 1979; Tilly 1990; Goldstone 1991; Katz 1997) included a range of international factors in their accounts. Goldfrank (1979: 143, 148-51) argued that the roots of revolutions lay in the

¹¹ Following McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001: 24), mechanisms are defined as ‘a delimited class of events that alter relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations’.

¹² Parts of this section draw on Lawson (2015a).

'world capitalist system' and its 'intensive international flows of commodities, investments, and laborers', 'great power configurations' (such as a shift in the balance of power), a 'favorable world situation' (such as changing client-patron relations), and a 'general world context' (such as a world war, which served to preoccupy great powers). Skocpol (1979: 14) famously argued that 'social revolutions cannot be explained without systematic reference to *international* structures and world historical development' (emphasis in original). Skocpol (1973: 30-1; 1979: 19-24) highlighted the formative role played by two international factors in the onset of revolutions: the uneven spread of capitalism and inter-state (particularly military) competition. Both of these factors were embedded within 'world historical time', by which Skocpol (1979: 23) meant the overarching context within which inter-state competition and capitalist development took place. Tilly (1990: 186) also highlighted the importance of inter-state competition, arguing that: 'All of Europe's great revolutions, and many of its lesser ones, began with the strains imposed by war'.¹³ Goldstone (1991: 24-5, 459-60) widened this focus by noting the ways in which rising populations across a range of territories served to foster state fiscal crises (by increasing prices and decreasing tax revenues), heighten elite fracture (as competition between patronage networks was sharpened), and prompt popular uprisings (as wages declined in real terms). Finally, Katz (1997: 13, 29) noted the ways in which 'central revolutions' (such as France in 1789) fostered 'waves' of 'affiliated revolutions' (also see: Markoff 1996; Sohrabi 2002; Beck 2011).

The 'retrieval' of the international by third generation revolutionary theorists has been extended by a number of fourth generation theorists (e.g. Goldstone 2001, 2009, 2014, 2015; Foran 2005; Kurzman, 2008; Beck 2011, 2014; Ritter 2015). Jack Goldstone (2014: 19, 21-2) highlights a variety of ways through which 'favorable international relations' serve as the conditions for societal instability, plus lists a range of factors, from demographic changes (such as rising populations) to shifting inter-state relations (such as the withdrawal of external support for a client regime), by which international

¹³ Despite this statement, Tilly's concern with the generative power of warfare was integrated more into his analysis of state-formation than it was into his account of revolutions. Indeed, the role of war (or any international factor) in fostering revolutionary situations is absent from Tilly's (1978) major work on the subject – *From Mobilization to Revolution*.

processes help to cause revolutions.¹⁴ As discussed below, of John Foran's (2005) five 'indispensible conditions' that have enabled revolutions in the Third World to take place, two – dependent development and world-systemic opening – are overtly international. Charles Kurzman (2008) has noted the ways in which a global wave of democratic revolutions in the early part of the 20th century spread over widely dispersed territories, from Mexico to China. Kurzman (2008: 8) argues that this wave acted as a 'dress rehearsal' for later events, most notably the 1989 revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe. Colin Beck (2011: 193) sees such waves as likely to increase 'as the level of world culture more rapidly expands', an argument that finds support in Mark Beissinger's (2014: 16-17) database of revolutionary episodes, which shows a marked increase in both the depth and breadth of revolutionary waves over the past century. Daniel Ritter (2015: 5) emphasizes the ways in which an international context characterized by the 'iron cage of liberalism' traps authoritarian states into accepting at least the rudiments of democratic practices. If authoritarian regimes are to maintain the benefits of ties with Western states, from arms to aid, then they must open up a space for non-violent opposition to emerge – the structural context of *international* liberalism provides an opening within which *domestic* non-violent opposition can mobilize.¹⁵

Given this proliferation of interest in the international components of revolutions, it could be argued that contemporary revolutionary scholarship has solved the 'problem' of the international. Many contemporary works are replete with references to transnational empirical connections (such as revolutionary repertoires that cross borders), while international factors are often seen as the precipitant cause of revolutions (through relations of dependent development), and as the direct outcomes of revolutions

¹⁴ Such fourth generation scholarship sits in parallel to recent work on the transnational dimensions of contentious politics, which stresses the co-constitutive relationship between domestic and international mechanisms (e.g. Tarrow 2005, 2012, 2013; Bob 2005, 2012; Weyland 2014). The word 'parallel' is used advisedly. With relatively few exceptions (e.g. Tarrow 2012: ch. 4; Tarrow 2013: ch. 2), debates on contentious politics are not well integrated into the study of revolutions.

¹⁵ Ritter's work provides a link to scholarship in International Relations (IR) that also stresses the constitutive impact of international factors on instances of revolution (e.g. Walt 1996; Halliday 1999; Bukovansky 2002; Lawson 2004, 2011, 2015a).

(through inducing inter-state conflict).¹⁶ It is certainly the case that these accounts have gone a considerable way to opening up a productive exchange between revolutionary theory and 'the international' – this article aims to build on the insights of Goldfrank, Skocpol, Goldstone, Foran, Kurzman, Beck, Ritter, and other pioneers. However, the article also seeks to extend the insights of this scholarship by demonstrating how 'the international' has not yet been theorized 'all the way down'. There are three motivations that lie behind this claim. First, despite increasing attention to the multiple connections between revolutions and the international, this relationship remains unevenly examined, being highly visible in some work (e.g. Foran 2005; Kurzman 2008; Goldstone 2014; Beck 2014; Ritter 2015), yet all but invisible in others (e.g. Parsa 2000; Goodwin 2001; Thompson 2004; Slater 2010).¹⁷ Clearly there is much still to do in terms of 'mainstreaming' international factors into the analysis of revolutions. Second, usage of the international is often reduced to a handful of factors. In Skocpol's analysis, for example, inter-state competition is a surrogate for military interactions, particularly defeat in war. Hence: 'wars ... are the midwives of revolutionary crises' (Skocpol 1979: 286). Such a view neglects the ways in which a cornucopia of international processes, from transnational cultural repertoires to inter-state alliance structures, affect the onset of revolutions. Third, much revolutionary scholarship has incorporated international factors via a strategy of 'add international and stir', grafting international factors *onto* existing theoretical scaffolding rather than integrating such factors *within* a single framework. This point is worth examining in more depth.

In John Foran's (2005: 18-23) influential work, revolutions in the Third World are seen as emerging from the interaction of five 'indispensible conditions': dependent

¹⁶ Goldstone (2015), for example, argues that international interventions had a major, in some cases, determinate, impact on the outcomes of the 2011 Arab uprisings.

¹⁷ Parsa's (2000) deployment of the international is restricted to the *ad hoc* activities of international organizations (such as the IMF) and non-governmental organizations (such as the International Red Cross). Goodwin's (2001) use of the international is limited to the observation that states inhabit an international system of states. Thompson (2004) barely mentions international factors at all. Slater's (2010) account of Southeast Asian revolutionary movements explicitly excludes the international dimensions of these movements from his theoretical apparatus, even as the empirical sections of his book are saturated with such factors. Such a bifurcation parallels Barrington Moore's (1967: 214) account of revolutions, which reduced the theoretical impact of international forces to 'fortuitous circumstances' even as his empirical account relied heavily on them (on this point, see Skocpol 1973).

development, which exacerbates social tensions; exclusionary, personalistic regimes, which polarize opposition; political cultures of opposition, which legitimize revolutionary movements; economic downturns, which radicalize these movements; and a world-systemic opening, which denotes a 'let-up' of external constraints. Two of Foran's five causal conditions are overtly international: dependent development and world-systemic opening. Yet these factors contain little by way of causal force. The first, dependent development, is a virtually universal condition of core-periphery relations – to paraphrase Skocpol's (1979: 34) comment on the ubiquity of 'relative deprivation': what 'peripheral' society lacks widespread dependence of one sort or another on a metropole? Even given Foran's (2005: 19) specific rendering of dependent development as, following Cardoso and Faletto (1979), Evans (1979), and Roxborough (1989), a particular process of accumulation ('growth within limits'), the concept is wide enough to be applicable to every 'Third World' state. This is something borne out by Foran's (2005: 255) own analysis, in which dependent development appears as a near constant of both successful and unsuccessful revolutions.¹⁸ In other words, the causal weight attributed to dependent development is nil: it serves as the background condition within which revolutions may or may not take place. In this sense, to posit relations between polities as dependent is less to assert a causal relationship than it is to describe the condition of every 'peripheral' state around the world. Without further specificity as to the quality and quantity of dependent development, the term becomes little more than a backdrop.

At first glance, Foran's (2005: 23) second 'international' category – world-systemic opening – by which he means a 'let-up' of existing international conditions through inter-state wars, depressions, and other such crises appears to be more promising. Yet, here too, the causal agency of the international is significantly curtailed as world-systemic opening is seen merely as the final moment through which the 'revolutionary window opens and closes' (Foran 2005: 252). In other words, the structural

¹⁸ Foran lists three exceptions (out of 39 cases) to the condition of dependent development – China (1911) (seen as a partial exception), Haiti (1986), and Zaire (1996). Yet it is difficult to see how these cases are free of dependent development in any meaningful sense. More convincing would be to see the three cases as ultra-reliant on wider metropolitan circuits, something Foran (2005: 254) seems to recognize in his depiction of Haiti and Zaire as cases of 'sheer underdevelopment'.

preconditions that lie behind revolutions lie elsewhere – in *domestic* regime type, cultures of opposition, and socio-economic conditions. World-systemic opening is the final curtain call on a play that has largely taken place elsewhere.

In this way, both of the international components of Foran's analysis are limited to walk-on roles: dependent development is the background from which revolutions may or may not occur; world-systemic opening is the final spark of a crisis that has been kindled elsewhere. The sequence through which Foran's multi-causal analysis works is highly significant: international (dependent development), domestic (exclusionary, repressive regimes), domestic (cultures of opposition), domestic (economic downturns), international (world-systemic opening). The fact that Foran's sequence *differentiates* international and domestic in this way reproduces the analytic bifurcation that his analysis – and fourth generation theorists more generally – hoped to overcome. Such a bifurcation occludes the myriad ways in which Foran's ostensibly domestic factors are deeply permeated by the international: exclusionary regimes are part of broader clusters of ideologically affiliated states, alliance structures, and client-patron relations; cultures of opposition are local-transnational hybrids of repertoires and meaning systems; socio-economic conditions are heavily dependent on market forces that transcend state borders. Rather than integrate the international throughout his causal sequence, Foran's maintains an empirical and theoretical bifurcation between domestic and international. And he loads the causal dice in favour of the former.

Foran's deployment of the international is emblematic of fourth generation revolutionary scholarship. For instance, Jack Goldstone (2001: 146), although clear that international factors contribute in multifaceted ways to both the causes and outcomes of revolutions, is equally clear about the division of labor that exists between these two registers:

Although the international environment can affect the risks of revolution in manifold ways, the precise impact of these 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 (emphasis added).

In similar vein, Goldstone's (2014) recent work makes much of the ways in which international factors serve as important conditions for, and causes of, revolutions. Yet, with the exception of noting the propensity of revolutions to stoke inter-state war, international factors largely drop out of Goldstone's account of revolutionary processes and outcomes. In this way, even fourth generation scholarship that claims to fully incorporate international factors into its analysis can be seen as containing two shortcomings: first, the maintenance of an analytical bifurcation between international and domestic registers; and second, retaining a residual role for the international. As a result, attempts to integrate international factors into the study of revolutions tend to fall into a condition of: 'add international and stir'. Grafting the international onto existing theoretical scaffolding retains – and sometimes strengthens, albeit unintentionally – the bifurcation between international and domestic. And this bifurcation contains an (often implicit) assumption that the former serves as the *secondary* dimensions of the latter's *primary* causal agency. How might an approach that sought to more thoroughly integrate the international into the study of revolutions proceed?

An inter-societal approach to revolutions starts from a simple premise: events that take place in one location are both affected by and affect events elsewhere. A number of transnational histories have pointed to the ways in which revolutionary events contain an international dimension that supersedes the national-state frame (e.g. Stone 2002; Adelman 2008; Hunt 2010). To take one example, the onset of the French Revolution cannot be understood without attention to the expansionist policies of the French state during the 17th and 18th centuries – between 1650 and 1780, France was at war in two out of every three years. This bellicosity, a product of pressures caused by developments in rival states as well as domestic factors, brought increased demands for taxation that, over time, both engendered factionalism in the *ancien regime* (Stone 2002: 259-60) and led to chronic state debt (Hazan 2014: 38). The interactive dimensions of international relations also affected events during the revolutionary period. For example, in 1792, as the Jacobins were losing influence to the Girondins, leading Girondins pressed the state into international conflict.¹⁹ As France's foreign campaigns

¹⁹ At the heart of the generalized Girondin-Jacobin conflict was a personal clash between Brissot and Robespierre. As Brissot called (successfully) for war with Austria,

went increasingly badly, the Committee of Public Safety, a leading site of Jacobin authority, blamed the Girondins for betraying the revolution and committed France to a process of domestic radicalization: ‘the Terror’ (see Hazan 2014: 299-303 for a critique of the ‘ideological’ use of this term). In this way, domestic political friction induced international conflict that, in turn, opened up space for heightened domestic polarization. The Jacobins identified the Girondins as ‘unrevolutionary’ traitors, speculators, and hoarders, while identifying themselves as the guardians of the revolution, a process of ‘certification’ that prompted a wave of popular militancy, most notably the *levée en masse* (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001: 323–7; Stone 2002: 194-208; Crépin 2013; Hazan 2014).

In addition to the dynamic roles played by inter-societal relations in both fostering the revolutionary situation and revolutionary trajectories in France, inter-societal relations also played a fundamental role in the outcomes of the revolution. First, the revolutionary regime annexed Rhineland and Belgium, and helped to ferment republican revolution in several neighboring countries, including Holland, Switzerland, and Italy. Second, the revolution prompted unrest throughout Europe, including Ireland, where a rebellion against English rule led to a violent conflict and, in 1800, the Acts of Union between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Third, the threat from France was met by extensive counter-revolution in neighboring states. In England, for example, *habeas corpus* was suspended in 1794, while legislation ranging from the Seditious Meetings Act to the Combination Acts was introduced in order to contain the spread of republicanism. Although the French did not generate an international revolutionary party, many states acted as if they had done just this, instituting domestic crackdowns in order to guard against the claim made by Jacques-Pierre Brissot that: ‘we [the French revolutionary regime] cannot be at peace until all Europe is in flames’ (cited in Palmer 1954: 11).

An inter-societal approach builds from this understanding of the *generative* role of flows between and across borders. Empirically, an inter-societal approach charts the ways in

arguing that French troops would be greeted as liberators, Robespierre responded with an apposite prognosis: ‘personne n'aime les missionnaires armés’ (‘no-one likes armed missionaries’). This is a lesson that subsequent revolutionaries have been slow to learn.

which relations between people, networks, and states drive revolutionary dynamics. The Haitian Revolution, for example, contained multifaceted inter-societal dimensions: its embedding within circuits of capitalist accumulation, slavery, and colonialism; its embroilment in inter-state wars; and its impact on the development of uprisings in Latin America and beyond (Shilliam 2008; Klooster 2009; Geggus 2010). Highlighting these empirical connections, whether direct or indirect, realizes the *descriptive* advantages of an inter-societal approach. To date, the development of such a descriptive inter-societal approach has been most evident in transnational, global, and economic history (e.g. Armitage and Subrahmanyam eds. 2010). However, the richness of this scholarship has not been matched by work that adequately explores the *analytical* advantages of an inter-societal approach. Analytically, an inter-societal approach is concerned with the ways in which the social logics of differentially located, but interactively engaged, social sites affect the causal pathways of revolutions. Such interrelations take many forms: the withdrawal of support from a patron, the pressures that emerge from the fusion of 'advanced' technologies in 'backward' sectors of the economy, the transmission of revolutionary ideas, the diffusion of contentious performances, the desire to emulate both revolution and counter-revolution, and so on. In both descriptive and analytical forms, inter-societal interactions are less the product of revolutions than their drivers.

The promise of an inter-societal approach rests on its capacity to theorize what otherwise appears as empirical surplus: the social logics contained within the inter-societal dynamics that constitute revolutionary processes. The concatenations of events through which revolutions emerge are dynamically related to the ways in which social relations within territories interact with those beyond their borders. Inter-societal relations form an interactive crucible for each and every case of revolution, from the desire to 'catch-up' with more 'advanced' states to the role of ideas in fermenting unrest across state borders. The 'external whip' of international pressures, added to the uneven histories within which social orders develop, produce an inter-societal logic that has not, as yet, been effectively theorized in the study of revolutions. It is the task of an inter-societal approach to identify these dynamics and demonstrate their generative role in the formation of revolutionary processes. Although it can be difficult both analytically and descriptively to avoid using nation-state frames, there is no sociological

rationale for maintaining the bifurcation between international and domestic. Revolutions are complex amalgams of transnational and local fields of action – they are ‘inter-societal’ all the way down.

Within and Beyond the Fourth Generation

This article has argued that seeing revolutions in a substantialist sense serves to reify them as static categories, precluding analysis of their multiple causal configurations as these are instantiated in time and across space. Although fourth generation approaches claim to be moving away from a focus on inalienable characteristics, they often remain trapped in accounts that stress contextless attributes, abstract regularities, ahistorical variables, and timeless properties. To a great extent, existing revolutionary theory is hampered by the debt it owes to powerful studies of the field, not least Skocpol’s (1979) reinvigoration of the subject in her classic *States and Social Revolutions*. It is the contention of this article that the agenda prompted by this study has run its course. The research programme it generated has been highly productive. But it cannot, by virtue of its substantialist commitments, respond effectively to the diverse contexts within which revolutions emerge. Nor can its continued bifurcation between structure and agency capture the relational character of revolutionary action. And nor can such analysis fully accommodate the ways in which revolutions are inter-societal all the way down.

Many of these critiques were also made by the pioneers of the fourth generation of revolutionary theory, which promised a break with the attributional ontology associated with Skocpol, a renewed emphasis on process and temporality, and greater attention to the international features of revolutions. Yet this article has explored the ways in which, for the most part, fourth generation approaches remain an agenda to be fulfilled. There has been a ‘stall’ in theories of revolution even as empirical studies of revolutionary episodes are thriving.²⁰ It is time for revolutionary theory to catch up. This article has made the case for reorienting fourth generation approaches around three guiding themes: first, a processual rather than attributional ontology, which sees revolutions as emergent processes in which embedded fields of action are challenged by novel assemblages of political, economic, and symbolic relations; second, assuming a

²⁰ My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for the phrasing of a ‘stall’ in revolutionary theory. This seems exactly right to me.

relational rather than substantialist commitment to social action oriented around meso-level contestations over meanings, practices, and institutions; and third, generating an inter-societal approach to the study of revolutions. As noted above, each of these moves is implicit within fourth-generation scholarship. Yet, for the most part, they remain a project to be realized. The goal of this article is to reconceptualize and reestablish the theoretical foundations of the study of revolutions. This, in turn, can provide the basis for the renewed empirical interest in revolutions that has emerged in the wake of the Arab Uprisings and similar events. One astute observer of revolutions notes that 'revolution has a future, even if many theoretical definitions of revolution do not' (Paige 2003: 19). This article suggests that theories of revolution do have a future, but only if the promise of fourth generation approaches is more fully realized.

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