

Session 12 – Movements and revolutions

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53882 (Monday, 3.30 – 5.30 p.m.)

53883 (Monday, 5.40 – 7.40 p.m.)

21/01/2023 – 24/04/2023

Overview of the session

- 1) Overview of the second mandatory excerpt (45min)
- 2) Questions about the final exam and organisation of the end of the class (15min)
- 3) Presentation of a classical excerpt in sociology (30 min)
- 4) Discussion by the designated discussants (10-15 min)





Don't forget the final exam!









Social movements

There is no pure definition of social movements !

One can nonetheless say that a social movement:

- Revolves around a conflict
- Is organised (there is a difference between a crowd and a social movement)
- Includes expression of an identity

Social movements with varying repertoires



The use of sociology in the public debate

“There cannot be police violence, because the police, and therefore the state, have a monopoly on legitimate violence. We've known that since Max Weber.”

Éric Zemmour

“[The police exercise violence, of course, but legitimate violence. It's as old as Max Weber!”

Gérald Darmanin

What do you think of these uses of Max Weber's theory of the state?

The use of sociology in the public debate

“The term 'legitimate', in [its] definition, does not have a normative meaning: it is not the equivalent of 'just' or 'rationally founded’.

The state's monopolization of legitimate violence, that is to say of the capacity to guarantee the law (and generally also to fix it), is a statement of fact: a certain type of power, territorial, has succeeded to impose its hegemony on other types of power that competed with it in previous centuries.”

Catherine Colliot-Thelene

Skocpol (Theda).

Born in Detroit, USA in 1947, she is a Professor of Government and Sociology at Harvard University and the first woman to get tenure in the sociology department at Harvard in 1984. Her work was influenced by Barrington Moore Jr., a political sociologist well known for his cross-country comparative studies of modernization.

She is associated with the Structuralist School, a structural approach to looking at social revolutions. Her more recent research interests include health care reform, public policy, and civic engagement amidst the shifting inequalities and partisan polarization in American democracy.

Skocpol (Theda). A Structural Analysis of Social Revolutions. 1979.

The book was published in 1979.

It is considered to be a paradigm-shifting work as it proposes a cohesive theory to explain how social revolutions happen and moves beyond the Marxian school of social revolutions. In it, she conceives of the state as an autonomous bureaucratic institution which acts in its own interests.

She takes a comparative approach that includes counter-examples that serve to her as “control” variables.

Skocpol (Theda). A Structural Analysis of Social Revolutions. 1979.

The central thesis of Theda Skocpol is that social revolutions can only happen when state organisations (the military and the bureaucracy) collapse in conflict with upper classes, which leaves openings for class revolts.

"According to my analysis, social revolutions occurred in those modernizing agrarian bureaucracies – France, Russia and China – which both incubated peasantries structurally prone to autonomous insurrection and experienced severe administrative and military disorganization due to the direct or indirect effects of military competition or threats from more modern nations abroad." (Skocpol, 1979).

Skocpol (Theda). A Structural Analysis of Social Revolutions. 1979.

Skocpol adopts a comparable method to study the few examples of true social revolutions that are clear cut and that were successful and which she identifies.

Skocpol (Theda). A Structural Analysis of Social Revolutions. 1979.

“As many students have noted, the comparative method is nothing but that mode of multivariate analysis to which sociologists necessarily resort when experimental manipulations are not possible and when there are ‘too many variables and not enough cases’ – that is, not enough cases for statistical testing of hypotheses.

According to this method, one looks for concomitant variations, contrasting cases where the phenomena in which one is interested are present with cases where they are absent, controlling in the process for as many sources of variation as one can, by contrasting positive and negative instances.” (Skocpol, 1979)

Skocpol (Theda). A Structural Analysis of Social Revolutions. 1979.

To quote Émile Durkheim: *“comparative sociology is not a particular branch of sociology; it is sociology itself, in so far as it ceases to be purely descriptive and aspires to account for facts”* (Durkheim, 1895).

Skocpol (Theda). A Structural Analysis of Social Revolutions. 1979.

Theda Skocpol's comparison highlights some key elements that each case study has in common and that help to understand how social revolutions come about:

- Modernizing agrarian bureaucracies
- Breakdown of societal controls
- Peasant insurrections
- Radical political movements led by marginal elites

What is specific about agrarian bureaucracies?

Skocpol (Theda). A Structural Analysis of Social Revolutions. 1979.

Agrarian bureaucracies are specific in terms of “societal type” for multiple reasons:

- Division of labour and coordination of efforts between a semi-bureaucratic state and upper class, especially in terms of extracting taxes and labour from peasants
- Landed upper class retains authority over peasant majority of population
- Centralized bureaucratic decision-making that accommodates regional/local power of landed upper class and sometimes recruits individual members of this class in leading positions in the state system
- Inherently vulnerable to peasant rebellions
- Faced enormous difficulties in meeting the crises of modernization

Skocpol (Theda). A Structural Analysis of Social Revolutions. 1979.

“All modernizing agrarian bureaucracies have peasants with grievances and face the unavoidable challenges posed by modernization abroad. So, in some sense, potential for social revolution has been built into all modernizing agrarian bureaucracies. Yet only a handful have succumbed.” (Skocpol, 1979)

Why have “only a handful succumbed”?

Skocpol (Theda). A Structural Analysis of Social Revolutions. 1979.

We pinpoint three components:

- Breakdown of social controls
- Peasant insurrection
- Radical political movements led by marginal elites

Breakdown of social controls

Due to overwhelming foreign pressure coupled with built-in structural incapacities to quickly mobilize resources to respond to those pressures.

Theda Skocpol shows that in each case, the foreign pressures linked with modernization were too strong to be overcome. In Russia's case, the specific historical context led to "inescapable and overwhelming" foreign pressures and involvements.

In the case of France and China, powerful landed elites prevented government from enacting change contrary to their class interests.

Peasant insurrection

“Agrarian bureaucracies had a lower-class stratum that was simultaneously strategic in the society's economy and polity (as surplus producer, payer of rents and taxes, and as provider of corvee and military manpower), and yet organizationally autonomous enough to allow the 'will' and 'tactical space' for collective insurrection against basic structural arrangements.” (Skocpol, 1979)

“If peasants are to be capable of self-initiated rebellion against landlords and state officials, they must have (a) some institutionally based collective solidarity, and (b) autonomy from direct, day-to-day supervision and control by landlords in their work and leisure activities.” (Skocpol, 1979)

Radical political movements led by marginal elites

These marginal elites are not the bourgeoisie (merchants, financiers, industrialists).

Rather, they consisted mostly in elites *“who possessed specialized skills and were oriented to state activities or employments, but either lacked traditionally prestigious attributes such as nobility, landed wealth, or general humanist education, or else found themselves in situations where such attributes were no longer personally or nationally functional”* (Skocpol, 1979).

They had a unique position that made them willing to call for radical reforms (e.g., equalization of mobility opportunities, political democracy, extension of civil liberties).

Revolutions with common causes and similar (but unexpected) results

“[...] the organized elites who provided the ultimately successful leadership in all social revolutions ended up responding to popular turmoil – counterrevolutionary threats at home and abroad, peasant anarchist tendencies, and the international crises faced by their societies – by creating more highly centralized, bureaucratized and rationalized state institutions than those that existed prior to the revolutions. This response, moreover, was entirely in character for elites adhering to world views which gave consistent primacy to organized political action in human affairs.” (Skocpol, 1979).

Revolutions with common causes and similar (but unexpected) results

Skocpol points out that all three revolutions had similar causes, and that the French case had different outcomes in that it didn't lead to a communist political organization.

She attributes this to differences in the opportunities presented by the world economy at the time – French revolution happened almost 150 years earlier than their Russian and Chinese counterparts.

Key takeaways

Theda Skocpol's analysis shares some elements with a Marxian perspective:

- Class solidarity
- Class struggle
- Understanding political events within historical context

But it differs from Karl Marx's work in that doesn't see revolution as inevitable, in fact revolutions depend upon a "perfect storm" of factors, including a temporary cooperation between the proletariat and the bourgeois classes. She takes a structuralist approach that focuses on class relationships rather than emphasizing discontent.

What other events could benefit from a *Skocpolian* structural analysis?

Questions related to the final exam and comments on the seminars

Allocation of presentations and discussions

Date	Session	Text excerpt
24/01	Sociological approaches	
31/01	The individual in social context	Douglas (Mary). Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo. 2003.
07/02	Norms and deviance	Becker (Howard). Outsiders. 1963.
14/02	Stratification and inequality	Marx (Karl) and Engels (Friedrich). The Communist Manifesto. 1848.
21/02	Identity and identification	Brubaker (Rogers). Trans. Gender and Race in an Age of Unsettled Identities. 2016.
07/03	Urban sociology	Venkatesh (Sudhir) and Levitt (Steven). History and disjuncture in the urban American street gang. 2000.

Allocation of presentations and discussions

Date	Session	Text excerpt
14/03	The family	Edin (Kathryn) and Kefalas (Maria). Promises I Can Keep: Why poor women put motherhood before marriage. 2005.
21/03	Religion	Snow (David) and Machalek (Richard). "The convert as a social type". 1976.
28/03	Education	Khan (Shamus). Privilege: The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St Paul's School. 2001.
04/04	Economic sociology	Esping-Andersen (Gøsta). 'Hybrid or Unique?: The Japanese welfare state between Europe and America'. 1997
11/04	Society and the state	Dubois (Vincent). The bureaucrat and the poor. Encounters in French Welfare Offices. 1999.
18/04	Movements and revolutions	McAdam (Douglas). The Biographical Consequences of Activism. 1989.

Presentation of a classical excerpt in sociology

Today's presentation is on:

McAdam, D. 1989. The Biographical Consequences of Activism, *American Sociological Review*, 54 (5), 744-760





Thank you!

Thank you for your attention throughout the seminar sessions!