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# REVOLUTIONS AND DEMOCRACY

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## 1. Revolution and power. Introduction

The concept of revolution has been very much debated in sociology and in political science, because it involves the twofold problem of political stability and democratization, and the search for the reason of the weakening of the base of political power is one of the core tasks of political science. Recently, the 2011 uprising in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Syria, followed by the breakdown of the authoritarian regimes in Tunisia and Egypt and by the civil war in Libya and Syria, have raised new interest in this concept among scholars, and the question whether what happened in those countries can be defined as revolutionary events has become central. The aim of this paper is nevertheless to enquire on the pure concept of revolution and on its theoretic application in social sciences, with no immediate reference to the Arab spring.[1] In connection with the two core questions of political stability and democratization, it could argued that the outbreak of a revolution is obvious evidence that the existing structure of power is crumbling, while a revolutionary change of the political structure may open the path to democratization and re-establish power on new foundations. The revolutionary process is therefore twofold because it firstly destabilizes the power structure, and subsequently generates a new one. In the revolutionary process, the basic circle of politics can be traced: foundation, crisis, and re-foundation of the power structure.

It is therefore no surprise that so much attention has been addressed to the concept of revolution, although its multi-fold aspect has led to many ambiguities in its analysis. The central aspect of any revolutionary

[1] References to this can be found in Giuseppe Ieraci, *Il crollo dei regimi non democratici. Stabilità politica e crisi di regime in Tunisia, Libia ed Egitto*, in «Rivista italiana di scienza politica», XLIII, 2013, n. 1, pp. 3-28, and *Fallen Idols. State Failure and the Weakness of Authoritarianism*, DiSPeS, Working paper 3, 2013.

process is the irreversible decay of the political power, which triggers social forces and opens the field to the redefinition of the social relations. Therefore, revolutions tend to be seen both as upheavals in the political sphere and as dramatic transformations within the social structure. These two aspects are entwined but analytically independent.

The relations in the political sphere are among the main objects of transformation in the aftermath of a revolution, because revolution normally implies a re-definition of the bases of the political power. So whatever approach to the approach is used, the dynamic of the power structure is a key factor in the study of the revolutionary process. Nonetheless, power tends to be regarded as a univocal phenomenon, with little or no concern about the difference between the forms of its exercise, particularly between its "regular" or "institutionalized" forms, on one hand, and its "brute" exercise on the other hand. For instance, if we accept a minimal definition of power as the capacity of getting something from somebody, resorting to potential threats or inducement through rewards, it should not escape notice that a mere exercise of power (might or *Macht*) is something different from the exercise of political authority (*Herrschaft*)[(2)]. *Macht* or might and *Herrschaft* or authority are two quite different types of power. Might is primarily based on the exploitation of resources by some specific group, whose capacity is immediately connected to the control of such resources. Therefore, might normally lacks autonomy from the social forces, which control the resources which make its exercise possible. Might tends to be personalistic. On the opposite side, political authority is a type of power "believed to be legitimate" whose exercise becomes autonomous from the direct control of some resources. Although there is obviously a "person" who exercises political authority, his authority derives from the political *role* and *function* that he plays. Compliance and obedience are therefore rendered in an abstract way to roles of authority, rather than to the person who actually occupies that specific role. Authority can be transmitted from one role incumbent to another. In other words, the capacities embedded in authority are easily transmittable from one person (i.e., "role incumbent") to another, while this is not so easy in the case of might. Obedience rendered to a mighty person ceases to be rendered when the person is not there any more, while specific political roles and functions may be easily performed by different people at different times and in various places. Might is

(2) See Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (edited by G. Roth and C. Wittich), Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1978.

attached to a given "person", authority is not. This is equal to saying that political authority is potentially an institutionalized form of power, as opposed to various forms of personal power. Political authority is stable once it has been properly founded, because it rests on the ruling of roles and functions. Personal power or might is highly instable, because it comes directly from the person or social groups who control some salient resources and are prone to use them to serve their immediate interests.

This distinction leads us to take into consideration the type of power that the revolutionary forces are facing, and its influence on the revolutionary process. The distinction between might and authority suggests that a basic variable in the analysis of the revolution may be the level of institutionalization of the challenged power. So the research questions are: What is the power situation leading to the outbreak of a revolution? Are there any differences between the causal factors in the breakdown of institutionalized and de-institutionalized power structures?

To proceed in this investigation, we ought to address firstly the concept of revolution, and then to the main theories to explain its outbreak. Current interpretations of revolution neglect the modes of power and their level of institutionalization. Whether it is possible to outline a unifying paradigm of the revolutionary process depends on the ability to solve the double conundrum of the tension between might and authority, on the one hand, and of the changing levels of institutionalization of the exercise of power, on the other.

## 2. Revolution. Concepts and Theories

### *2.1. Concepts*

As clarified by Hannah Arendt, a revolution is both a perennial return to a starting point and a preliminary step towards the foundation of the community on new bases. As she stated, «revolutions are the only political events which confront us directly and inevitably with the problem of beginning», and therefore they mean to «change the structure of the political realm»[(3)]. This new beginning coincides with the idea of freedom, not to be understood simply as the desire to be free from

(3) Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, New York, Viking Press, 1963. I'm quoting here (and in the following) from the Pelican Books ed. (1973), p. 21, 25.

oppression but rather (following Herodotus): «as a form of political organization in which the citizens [live] together under conditions of no-rule, without a division between rulers and ruled»[4]. As a result, «only where this pathos of novelty is present and where novelty is connected with the idea of freedom are we entitled to speak of revolution»[5].

Consistent with the etymology of "revolution", which in its astronomical use means an orbital motion of one or more bodies around a center of mass, quite frequently a political and social revolutionary movement demands the return to some original situation, when the world was uncorrupted and the "rights" of the parts involved were wholly deployed and respected. As a paradox, a revolution is hence an urge towards restoration, and when people are invoking a revolution, normally they are claiming their usurped rights. It is therefore of some relevance to comprehend the reasons why the revolutionary phenomenon in modernity is invariably associated with the idea of a palingenesis and of radical change. There is an implicit religious and philosophical meaning of the word revolution, as in some ancient religious-philosophical systems, where the palingenesis meant a periodic renewal of the individual or of the cosmos, the rebirth of man after death or renewal of the world to the end of time. As we noticed, Arendt catches perfectly well this aspect of the notion of revolution when she points out the "novelty" in the foundation of a "republic", or political community, as the distinctive feature of revolutions: «revolution on the one hand, and constitution and foundation on the other, are like correlative conjunctions»[6]. The problem posed by the modern revolution is not simply social and economic, but primarily political.

The return to some original and uncorrupted state of affairs and the foundation of the community on a new *political* basis are the key elements well reflected in most definitions of the concept of revolution provided in literature. Nonetheless, these definitions often blur the political dimension of the revolution with other secondary social, cultural and economic characters. For instance, Huntington defines revolution

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(4) *Ibid*, p. 30. According to Arendt, the desire to be free from oppression is "liberation", which therefore is different from "freedom" which is the desire to constitute a "republic": «[Freedom] necessitated the formation of a new, or rather rediscovered form of government; it demanded the constitution of a republic» (p. 33).

(5) *Ibid*., p. 34. Later Arendt specifies that «novelty, beginning, and violence» are all intimately associated with the modern notion of revolution (p. 47). On the connection between revolution and freedom, as a constitutive process, see also *infra*, chap. 4, pp. 141-54.

(6) *Ibid*., p. 126.

as «rapid, fundamental, and violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths of a society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership, and governmental activities and policies»[7]. Huntington's definition, among other similar ones, retains a holistic approach to revolutions, which makes these definitions scarcely analytical, but nonetheless they may be useful in helping to grasp the religious-philosophical afflatus of the revolutionary phenomenon.

This holistic and social interpretation of revolution is shared also by Skocpol, according to whom «*social* revolutions are rapid, basic transformations of a society's state and class structures; and they are accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below»[8]. Skocpol assumes that a revolt would not produce a structural change, even when it is successful and triggered by an upheaval of the subordinated classes, while a *political* revolution transforms the state structures but not the societal structures, and it is not necessarily carried out through a class conflict[9]. In other words, only social revolutions are truly revolutionary, because unlike all the other types of conflict they affect the social structures in depth and permanency. Social revolutions are the sum of two concurrences: «the coincidence of societal structural change with class upheaval; and the coincidence of political with social transformations»[10].

These approaches lack analytical precision, because of their ambition to encompass all possible aspects of a revolution. The notion of "revolution" itself suggests some epochal transformations; the «World turned upside down»[11]. Needless to say, the historical events with which we commonly associate the notion of revolution, such as the English, the French or the Russian revolutions, convey this emphasis on change. As

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(7) Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1968, p. 264.

(8) Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: a Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979, p. 4, italics added.

(9) The two English revolutions (the Parliamentary Revolution led by Oliver Cromwell in 1640-50 and the Glorious Revolution of 1688-89) were both *political*, and so was the Meiji restoration in Japan (*ibid*., p. 4).

(10) «In contrast, rebellions, even when successful, may involve the revolt of subordinate classes – but they do not eventuate in structural change. Political revolutions transform state structures but not social structures, and they are not necessarily accomplished through class conflict» (*ibid*., p. 4).

(11) This is the renowned title of an influential book by Christopher Hill (*The World Turned Upside Down. Radical Ideas during the English Revolution*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1972).

above argued, the "religious" afflatus of the revolutionary process, the shaping of a "new man" and the fact that this new man is apparently able to cast himself free from any pre-existing social constraint, produces in the observer the impression that these changes have completely upset the general structure of the society. Only the revolutions that have generated this widespread change are actually classified as such, while other conflicts are downgraded to minor events (rebellions, uprisings, and *political* revolutions). On the one hand, this reasoning has elements of subjectivity, because it is up to the researcher to define the spectrum of change recorded, and on this base to define the magnitude of the conflict, and whether it is a revolution or something less. On the other hand, there is an underestimation of the elements of structural continuity between the pre- and post-revolutionary phases, because it is hardly possible to conceive transformations on such a scale, which – to recall Skocpol's terms – sum together a structural change of the society, the disruption of the classes, political transformations and social transformations[12]. Something from the pre-existing regime must have survived.

The major limitation of the holistic or macro-sociological approach is the possible mismatch between certain effects and their causes. Are the class conflicts and the social tensions of the historical phases that precede the revolution what brings about the complete collapse of the regime? Or is it rather the resulting political vacuum which unleashes the social forces and plunges the regime into chaos? This second and more focused interpretation subordinates the social factors of the revolution to the political ones and suggests that the world has turned upside down because the "political idols" who supported the regime have fallen. In other words, might or political authority has vanished, and the camp is now open to all social forces and every instinct can be vented. This point is precisely caught by Arendt: «Revolutions always appear to succeed with amazing ease in their initial stage, and the reason is that the men who make them first only pick up the power of a regime in plain disintegration; they are the consequences but never the causes of the downfall of political authority»[13]. So what are the causes of the downfall of political authority?

The holistic or macro-sociological approaches to revolution reduce the political struggle and conflict in the revolutionary process to epiphenomena with respect to some more fundamental and dominant social

[12] Theda Skocpol, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
[13] Hannah Arendt, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

and economic factors. Nonetheless, no matter how many dimensions are involved in a revolution, it necessarily affects primarily the political domain, because a regime vanishes and a new one is founded, the existing power structure is swept away and new political forces try to occupy the vacuum left. The holistic conceptual approach is one-sided because it focuses on the consequences of the revolution, which are the social upheavals occurring as a result of the collapse of the existing political power or in connection with its weakening. It would seem more appropriate to direct the analysis towards the causes of the collapse of the political power rather than on the social consequences of its downfall.

### *2.2. Theories*

The theories which try to explain revolution are evidently affected by these conceptual ambiguities. Following Skocpol, there are three main perspectives on revolutions, apart from the Marxist approach. The socio-psychological theories explain that revolutions are the result of the fact that people's involvement in political violence and opposition is determined by psychological motivations. The systemic theories of consensus interpret revolutions as violent reactions of some ideological movements to the disequilibrium of the social system. Finally, the theories based on political conflict focus on the conflict between the government and organized groups, which challenge the power incumbents and aim at the seizure of power[14]. Skocpol revaluates the Marxist approach based on the social classes and their conflicts, but she considers it appropriate to combine this analysis with the concepts of the theory of political conflict. We shall refer primarily to this theory and confine our critical review of the theories of revolution to the contributions of Huntington, Tilly, Barrington Moore and Skocpol.

One of the main problems in the theoretic definition of revolution, which is evident in the works of Huntington, Tilly, B. Moore and Skocpol, is the difference between revolution and other forms of political conflict,

(14) A review of these approaches is offered by Skocpol (*op. cit.*, pp. 4-33). The reader can refer to Skocpol's analysis for further details on the three perspectives and their related literature. Gurr (Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel?*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1970), Johnson (Chalmers Johnson, *Revolutionary Change*, Boston, Little, Brown, 1966) and Tilly (Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, New York, Random House, 1978) are respectively three seminal works in the socio-psychological, systemic and conflict theories.

such as riots, rebellions, uprisings, coup d'état, civil wars and independence wars. There is a kind of positive prejudice in favor of revolution in the works these authors, as a noble and "superior" form of political struggle in comparison with the others. This prejudice is also evident in Hannah Arendt's conclusion that only the American experience conveyed both the authenticity of the search for freedom and the desire for the foundation of a new polity as the true features of the revolution[15]. Both the definition of revolution set by Huntington and Skocpol – see above – recall its "greatness", which implies not simply an overthrow of the political leadership, but some fundamental changes of the political institutions of the regime and of its social structure. Huntington makes clear that what he calls "revolution" corresponds to what other authors have labeled "great revolution", "epochal revolution" or "social revolution"[16]. The boundaries which separate conceptually all these manifestations of social and political conflicts, ranging from riots, rebellions, uprisings, coup d'état, civil wars, independence wars, and finally to revolution (or Great revolution), are blurred and not clearly defined. In a way, we can only judge whether a conflict is a rebellion or a proper revolution observing its consequences ex post, and the question of whether a self-proclaimed revolutionary leader is really such, or is instead a brutal political opportunist is often a matter of historical and moral judgment, based on the evaluation of the political and social consequences of their acts[17].

Huntington argues that revolution is a characteristic of modernization and that it was unknown in traditional society. It is a historically determined concept because it is an extreme «explosion of political participation»[18], which is only possible in a modernizing context where political consciousness and mobilization is extended to new social groups. To evaluate how revolutionary a revolution is, Huntington suggests ex post measurements of the quickness and extension of the political participation, and of the authority and stability of the institutions created by the revolution. In the "Western" revolution, there is a power breakdown which anticipates the revolutionary *Machtergreifung*. The political insti-

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(15) Cfr. Hannah Arendt (*op. cit.*, pp. 141-54), where she states the equation between «revolution with the struggle for liberation» which is leading to the foundation on a new political order.

(16) Samuel P. Huntington, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

(17) Take the case of Emiliano Zapata and Francisco Pancho Villa during the Mexican revolution of 1910-1911 and their ambiguous attitude with regard to the liberal opposition to the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz. Were they revolutionaries of rebels?

(18) Samuel P. Huntington, *op. cit.*

tutions of the old regime fall down, and in consequence new groups mobilize and new political institutions are created. The collapse of the existing regime is mainly provoked by the reaction of the urban classes and eventually the revolution spreads from the towns to the country, from the centre to the peripheries. The "Eastern" revolution, on the contrary, starts with the political mobilization of new groups and the creation of new political institutions, and it ends with the violent destruction of the institution of the previous regime. The established power is capable of persisting, there is no immediate seizure of power by any challengers and a temporary stalemate is generated, in which a revolutionary resistance develops against the power incumbents and the revolutionary struggle is unleashed. In this pattern, the revolutionary push comes from the country and the periphery, and eventually affects the towns and the capital as well, it is a dynamic generated from the peripheries to the centre. There is hence a fundamental difference in the sequences between the two patterns of revolution: «In the Western revolution, the political mobilization is the consequence of the collapse of the old regime; in the Eastern revolution it is the cause of the destruction of the old regime»[(19)].

In most interpretations, the distinction between revolutions, on one hand, and rebellions, insurrections, riots, uprisings, wars of independence and coupe d'état, on the other, is apparently clear. A revolution affects values, myths, political institutions, social structure, leadership and government, therefore it basically affects all the relevant aspects of a society, while the other phenomena regard society only partially and not as a whole. In practice, this distinction is very rough and judgmental, and it is based possibly on the degree and extension of the changes observed in the objects invested by it. At the most, revolution as a concept is only a post-diction.

This perspective is equally shared by Skocpol and Tilly, but surprisingly absent in B. Moore[(20)]. It is an apparent stronghold, because B. Moore chooses not to define the concept of revolution, which is assumed as self-evident or intuitive. Therefore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* escapes the pitfalls of the current definitions of revolution simply by avoiding the task of defining it. Several concepts could be found, such as bourgeois revolution, liberal revolution, conservative revolution, peasant revolution, merchant revolution, not to mention more

(19) *Ibid*., p. 267.

(20) Barrington Moore Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1966.

various historical and contextual declensions of the concept, such as Puritan revolution, English revolution, French revolution and similar. There are nonetheless two key features often referred to by B. Moore, which allow some sort of generalization. Firstly, as can be inferred from B. Moore's studies of the Puritan revolution (e.g. the English revolution) and of the American civil war (considered a bourgeois revolution), some characteristic of revolution may be derived through an estimate of the consequences the historical events. The radius of a revolution – as is assumed in the analyses of Huntington and Skocpol – is relatively large in comparison with other conflict events, because its effects are «deep and lasting in the judicial sphere and in the social relations»[21]. Once again, a holistic perspective is here implied and a revolution is an overall upsetting of any pre-existing establishment towards a "new society" and a "new world". Secondly, revolution is associated with the conquering of freedom to be achieved through pacific reforms, but ultimately only possible by resorting to violence or open conflict. For instance, according to B. Moore, in England revolutionary violence was the prelude to more peaceful transformations[22]. Altogether, B. Moore is not concerned with the analysis of the concept of revolution in itself, because the historical events he studies appear to him "Great" enough to justify the label.

Tilly is more of a conceptual challenge, because of his attempt to frame the European revolutions of the last five hundred years (1492-1992)[23]. In his attempt, Tilly privileges three points of view, firstly, the character of the revolutions with regard to the transformations of the European social structure and of the relations of the states in the international arena; secondly, the link between revolutionary processes and non-revolutionary collective actions; and finally, the regularities and changes in the revolutionary process in Europe through the centuries. Tilly argues that these three points of view converge into a single focus, which provides a valid definition of revolution as «a forcible transfer of the state power». Consequently, any useful analysis of the revolutions should deal with the way the states and the use of force vary in time, space and according to the social structure[24]. Hence, the organization of any given state and the relationships among states impact on the propensity to revolution. On these bases, Tilly provides a definition of revolu-

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 22.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 24.
[23] Charles Tilly, *European Revolutions, 1492-1992*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1993.
[24] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

tion as «a forcible transfer of the state power, in the course of a struggle involving at least two distinct blocs of contenders that make incompatible claims to control the state with some significant segments of the population supporting the claims of the rival contenders»[25]. The "blocs" may be single actors, such as the class of the land owners, but more often they are coalitions of rulers, members of the establishment and/or of the oppositions, because in a revolution these distinctions tend to blur and change. When two or more blocs of contenders claim control over the state, the struggle for power is unleashed. There is a splitting of the state sovereignty and hegemony among contenders, then a phase of struggle, and eventually the re-establishment of the sovereignty and hegemony under a new power. So the revolutionary process encloses a sequence of phases, from the multiplication of the sovereignties to the re-establishment of its unity, although not all the revolutionary situations generate a revolutionary outcome. In many cases, in fact, the old state rulers prevail over their challengers. They may succeed in co-opting some of the new challengers and blocking the others. Sometimes a civil war determines a permanent division in the state community[26]. All these precautions induce Tilly to set clearly the distinction between the revolutionary situations and revolutionary outcomes. A revolutionary situation implies a phase of convulsive multiple sovereignties facing each other, and advancing irreconcilable claims to control the state. The revolutionary outcome is complete when there is a passage of power from the rulers or the coalitions, which held it before the beginning of the phase of multiple sovereignties, to a new dominant coalition[27].

Tilly is aware of the difficulties in tracing sharp conceptual boundaries based on his general definition of revolution, «many civil wars and struggles for succession qualify as revolution, because at the end the power passes hands after a forcible breakdown of the sovereignty». A similar transfer of power may be recognized in some cases of seizure of power by the military, when there is an evident fracture in the state community[28]. Tilly suggests a typology of all these situations crossing the degree of fracture in the state community (ranging from none to total) and the degree of transfer of power (ranging from none to total). A "Great revolution" involves both total transfer of power and total fracture

[25] *Ibid*., p. 17.
[26] *Ibid*., p. 26.
[27] *Ibid*., pp. 19-25.
[28] *Ibid*., p. 26.

in the state community.

It is doubtful whether Tilly's typology may really help to distinguish revolutions from other types of political action, in which some revolutionary elements could be recognized. The anchoring of the concept of revolution to that of state introduces a strong limitation in the historical perspective. Tilly does provide a state-centered explanation of revolution, because the division of sovereignty as its key property is defined with respect to the state authority. As a historical phenomenon, the state reached is full evolution in the Western world and particularly in Europe. In its Weberian conception, the Western modern state combines the typical characteristics of institutionalized power (referred to previously). According to Tilly, a state's vulnerability to revolutions depends on its capacity to control resources and the activities of its population. Revolutionary situations were manifested in European history when the gap between what the state demanded from its citizens and what they actually provided in return increased. Secondly, they were manifested when the state's requests to its citizens threatened some strong collective identities and the rights connected to those identities. Finally, there were revolutionary situations when the power of the rulers declined *vis à vis* some strong challengers. The revolutionary situations resulted in revolutionary outcomes particularly when the third condition was satisfied, that is when the state capacity of coercion was significantly and evidently reduced[29].

Tilly assumes that revolution is a pathology of the state, therefore – as a paradox – it is hard to conceive a revolution in a situation where there is no state. In other words, because Tilly defines the concept of multiple sovereignty with respect to the state authority or to the changing levels of stateness, and the state is conceived according to the Western and Weberian pattern of development, the violent political conflicts which occur in any other political community do not fit into the framework. A violent confrontation among two or more political fractions, whose target would be the seizure of power and the establishment of a new legitimacy, may be even more likely where the state is absent or the level of stateness is declining. State centered approaches, with their bias in favor of legitimate authority and of the monopoly of violence over a territory, sometimes neglect to evaluate the conditions in which the stateness is ei-

[29] *Ibid.*, pp. 326-27.

ther an impediment or a favorable factor of the onset of the revolution[30].

## 3. Political Institutionalization and Revolution

So let us move our analysis towards the conditions of the state or community power in the phases which lead up to the revolutionary situation. There is another questionable assumption in Tilly's framework. The transfer of power treated as a cardinal variable (ranging from none to total) conveys the idea that handing the power from one group or leader to another may be a simple matter of degree, and a normal occurrence in politics. This assumption is open to objection. As argued elsewhere the level of institutionalization of the political power may vary from case to case, and the modality and likelihood of the transfer of power are strongly connected to this level[31].

It is therefore necessary to deal briefly with the concept of political institutionalization, which is so much in use in political science and yet so full of ambiguities. In the classic and sociologic approach to the theme, the concept of institutionalization refers to the establishment of some prescribed patterns of behavior[32], but we owe to Huntington its most renowned application to the political domain. 'Adaptability-Rigidity', 'Complexity-Simplicity', 'Autonomy-Subordination', 'Coherence-Disunity' are four criteria of political institutionalization set by Huntington[33]. Apart from the tautological connection between these criteria and political stability[34], they scarcely address the *political* function

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(30) State power and stateness are recognized key factors by Hinnebusch in understanding the consequences of violent uprising and the perspectives of democracy: Raymond Hinnebusch (ed.), *From Arab Spring to Arab Winter: Explaining the Limits of Post-Uprising Democratization*, in «Democratization», Special Issue, XXII, 2015, n. 2.

(31) Giuseppe Ieraci, *Il crollo dei regimi non democratici,* cit., and *Fallen Idols,* cit.

(32) Take, for instance, the influential contribution in this debate offered by Eisenstadt: «The process of institutionalization is the organization of a societally prescribed system of differentiated behavior oriented to the solution of certain problems inherent in a major area of social life». Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, *Institutionalization and Change*, in «American Sociological Review», XXIX, 1964, n. 2, pp. 235-47, p. 235.

(33) Samuel P. Huntington, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-24.

(34) «Huntington offers several criteria for the institutionalization of the existing political organization: adaptability, complexity, autonomy, coherence (with the latter essentially meaning consensus among the active participants in the political system). This sort of definition-making increases the risk that Huntington's arguments will become tautological. To the extent that one judges adaptability, complexity, autonomy, and coherence on the basis of the absence or containment of domestic violence and instability, the circle of truth by defi-

fulfilled by institutions and they appear more as *organizational* criteria. An organization might well be extremely developed in terms of 'Adaptability', 'Complexity', 'Autonomy', and 'Coherence', and yet offer very precarious answers to the basic issues of the allocation of power resources and the transmission of power. This mismatch of organizational and institutional properties has deeply affected comparative politics since the publication of Huntington's seminal work and it is clearly revealed by Huntington's distinction between civic and praetorian politics[35]. This dichotomy reflects the variable ability of the political authorities to face the level of political participation, which has become a challenge to the stability of any contemporary mass society. Political participation in mass movements may combine violent and nonviolent, legal and illegal, coercive and persuasive actions. The difference between "mass society" and "participant polity" lies in the capacity of the latter to organize and structure broad participation «into legitimate channels». Surprisingly, Huntington minimizes the importance of the traditional structures and channels of participation, such as parliaments and representative assemblies, the executive and its bureaucracies: «The modern polity thus differs from the traditional polity [...]. The institutions of a modern polity must organize the participation of the mass of the population. The crucial institutional distinction between the two is thus in the organizations for structuring mass participation in politics. *The distinctive institution of the modern polity, consequently, is the political party*»[36]. The connection between participation and institutionalization is crucial in Huntington's analysis, because of its implication in the understanding of the revolutionary phenomena: «The political essence of revolution is the rapid expansion of political consciousness and the rapid mobilization of new groups into politics at a speed which makes it impossible for existing political institutions to assimilate them. Revolution is the extreme case of the explosion of political participation»[37].

Since then, in comparative politics no clear distinction has been maintained between institutions and organizations. Obviously, a parlia-

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nition will close»: Charles Tilly, *Does Modernization Breed Revolution?*, in «Comparative Politics», Special Issue on Revolution and Social Change, V, 1973, n. 3, pp. 425-47, p. 431. A similar criticism against Huntington's criteria of institutionalization was made by Gabriel Ben-Dor, *Institutionalization and Political Development: A Conceptual and Theoretical Analysis*, in «Comparative Studies in Society and History», XVII, n. 3, pp. 309-25.

[35] Samuel P. Huntington, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-79 ff.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 89, italics added.

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 266.

ment is at the same time an organizational phenomenon but its political functions cannot be reduced to adaptability, complexity, autonomy, and coherence. A parliament provides a political arena of confrontation of two or more organized interests, it is not an organized interest itself but rather the context where the interests meet and conflicts are resolved. A party is *an organized interest*, a parliament is not such. Typically, a political institution differs from an organized political interest because the former is concerned with the procedure to follow in the fulfilment of whatever interest and with the radius of the action of the authorities entitled to fulfil it. This is why a political institution becomes a guarantee for the parts in conflicts, and the provision of such a multilateral guarantee constitutes precisely its political function. An organized political interest, on the contrary, perceives procedure, rules and authority as mere instruments for the acquisition of some specific goals. In some ways, this argument is similar to Feit's: «Institutions must be distinguished from organizations. An institution may be organized, and an organization can become institutional, but the two are not necessarily the same»[38].

Having blurred the distinction between institutions and organizations, Huntington failed to detect the weakness of the authoritarian regimes structured around a single party, as in the case of the former Soviet Union, which is classified as a civic polity characterized by high participation and high political institutionalization. «United States, Great Britain and the Soviet Union differ significantly from each other», but they are similar as «legitimate or law-abiding states, where the rules acted in the public interests»[39]. This prejudice in favor of the non-democratic regimes, when supported by strong and articulated party (or other) organizations deeply enrooted in society, is well expressed by Bellin's theory of the *The Robustness of Authoritarianism*[40]. Notwithstanding the strength of their party organizations, the authoritarian "civic polities" are intrinsically weak because they are not institutionalized. They are indeed based on the complete subjugation of the governmental functions to an interest organization, which excludes permanently some social classes or parts of the society from the access to the governmental institutions and from

(38) Edward Feit, *Pen, Sword and People: Military Regimes in the Formation of Political Institutions*, in «World Politics», XXV, 1973, n. 2, pp. 251-73, p. 251.

(39) Samuel P. Huntington, *op. cit*., p. 81.

(40) Eva Bellin, *The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East. Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective*, in «Comparative Politics», XXXVI, 2004, pp. 139-57. For a criticism, see Giuseppe Ieraci, *Fallen Idols*, cit.

the assumption of whatever form of political accountability. Huntington had unfortunately mistaken the brute exercise of power (might) through (party) organizations for a form of institutionalized power.

A minimal definition of the institutionalization of political power is provided when the following conditions are met: a) there is an established and recognized *attribution of roles of authority*; b) a defined and admitted range of action is attached to any of such roles, on the base of some *allocated procedural resources*; c) finally, the given roles favor the emerging of *arenas of institutional confrontation*[41]. This definition is minimal because it only takes into consideration those factors whose subtraction would deprive any exercise of power of its foreseeable character and would reduce it to mere exercise of might. The definition does not exclude the possibility that an institutionalized form of power may be supported by some organizational capacity (political parties, bureaucratic organizations, militia and other forms or political organized mobilization), or that the role incumbents may control personally and directly any other type of economic, social and psychological resources, such as revenue, moral or intellectual prestige and capacity, charisma and personal appeal. Whatever is the case, the exercise of power changes from being a mere exercise of might and loses its brutal features when it is embedded in some recognized roles, whose range of action is relatively foreseeable, and when these roles interact in given patterns in the context of a relatively well defined arena of confrontation.

The argument against Tilly's perspective is twofold. On one hand, the transfer of power is more likely in highly institutionalized regimes, such as democratic regimes. On the other hand, as an apparent paradox, a "revolution" is more likely where the transfer of power is more unlikely[42]. In democracy, the transfer of power sometimes implies deep

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(41) See Giuseppe Ieraci, *Teoria dei governi e democrazia. Ruoli, risorse e arene istituzionali*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2003.

(42) A recent statistical analysis on pro-democratic protests concludes that «Pro-democratic protest are even more likely to arise [...] when people are unable to remove the incumbent government from office»: Dawn Brancati, *Pocketbook Protests: Explaining the Emergence of Pro-Democracy Protests Worldwide*, in «Comparative Political Studies», XLVII, 2014, pp. 1503-30, p. 1525. This statement is consistent with our theoretic proposition. Przeworski claims that «competitive elections are a self-institutionalizing mechanism. [...] Contending political forces channel their efforts into electoral competition rather than engage in violence when elections offer them *real prospects of prevailing at some point in the future*, when governments can change as a consequence of elections»: Adam Przeworski, *Acquiring the Habit of Changing Governments Through Elections,* in «Comparative Political Studies», XLVIII, 2014, pp. 101-29, p. 121, italics added.

frictions in society and fractures in the state community, but not necessarily, and it hardly ever results in a revolutionary outbreak[43]. Tilly's combination of a power transfer with fractures of the state community as connotations of revolutions would imply a further dimension of analysis, namely the nature of the political conflict, either "normal" or violent[44]. A "normal" political process, such as in the case of the highly institutionalized political process which normally takes place in democracy, is primarily characterized by the absence of violence or by its confinement to marginality in the dynamics of the transfer of power. In other words, what would explain both theoretically and empirically the outbreak of a revolution is the variable level of institutionalization of the political process and of the political community, which impinge on the likelihood of the transfer of power and of its "normal" outcome (non violent).

## 4. States and revolutions. A conclusion

Revolutions are bound to happen where the level of political institutionalization of the community is very low or rapidly declining. Skocpol argues that Tilly's explanatory model of the revolution and, similarly, the Marxist perspective do not recognize the autonomy of the state, whose logics and interests are reduced to the interests of the dominant class or of the groups leading the state. Generally, the prevailing approaches to the study of revolution emphasize the social discontent among new groups, the opportunity for collective or mass mobilization, and finally the action of the newly born revolutionary movement against the dominant authorities or social class[45]. These approaches (and Tilly's in par-

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(43) A similar point is made by Gurr, although Gurr's argument is not straightforwardly institutional, and he rather refers to cognitive, cultural and psychological factors too: «The elites of democratic states have developed and employ a complex repertoire of noncoercitive responses to challenges: increased channels of political participation, redistribution, symbolic and substantive shifts in public policy, cooptation of opposition leaders, diversion of affect and attention onto external targets»: Ted Robert Gurr, *War, Revolution, and the Growth of the Coercive State, in James A. Caporaso (ed.), The Elusive State. International and Comparative Perspectives, London, Sage Publications, 1989, pp. 49-68, pp. 58-59.* In Dahl's terms, one could summarize Gurr's point alluding to the inversely proportional relation between costs of tolerance and costs of repression in the democratic regimes: see Robert A. Dahl, *Poliarchy. Participation and Opposition*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1971, p. 16.

(44) Charles Tilly, *European Revolutions*, cit., pp. 26-27.

(45) Theda Skocpol, *op. cit.*

ticular) convey the idea that the revolutions develop as intentional acts of the majoritarian disadvantaged classes, who agree that their needs are neglected by the minority in power. Rejecting the assumption of some intentional pushes toward the revolutionary process, Skocpol advances a "structural perspective" of the social and historical facts[46].

These are relevant criticisms, so far as it has been pointed out that Tilly interprets the revolution as a conflict between the state's incumbents and their challengers[47]. Tilly suggests a sort of bilateral coincidence between the state and the groups which control it, in a way that the power of such dominant groups is at the same time the power of the state[48]. As it is conceived by Tilly, the power of the state has no autonomy from the groups which claim the monopolies over the use of coercion and over other forms of functional control[49]. This lack of autonomy indicates that the level of institutionalization of the exercise of political power is relatively low, and that the *roles of authority*, the *procedural resources,* and the *arenas of the institutional confrontation do not emerge as distinct from the groups that control them and use them to display their might, rather than exercising political authority.*

If one reflects on the effects that these three criteria of institutionalization produce, one can reasonably assume, firstly, that they make the use of power predictable and limited, and secondly that they make its smooth and continuous transmission feasible. These assumptions are easy to explain. The identification of the roles of authority, the recognized limitation of the resources allocated to these roles, and finally the containment of the power relations within some clearly identifiable areas of the confrontation depersonalize the use of power and make its private use very difficult and unlikely.

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(46) Skocpol's structural framework includes two aspects of the transnational contest, the structure of the world capitalist economy and the "world timing". On these two structural aspects, Skocpol grafts two more triggering factors of the revolution, namely the autonomy of the state, and finally the structure of class conflict.

(47) For this general interpretation, see Tilly's *From Mobilization to Revolution*, cit., where Tilly uses the concept of "polity" instead of state, but the triggering mechanism of the revolutionary process is similar. See also Charles Tilly, *Contention and Democracy in Europe. 1650-2000*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004.

(48) Skocpol makes this point clear, cfr. *op. cit.*

(49) We owe to Elias the perspective according to which the state is not simply a "legitimate monopoly of coercion", but rather a more complex system of interrelated monopolies (i.e., over finances, over the administration of justice, over education) which are the necessary complement of the monopoly of coercion. Cfr. Norbert Elias *The Civilizing Process. State Formation and Civilization*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1982.

The problems in the interpretation of revolution lie in the ambiguous treatment of the notion of power. Hardly any scholar, Huntington included, has grasped the difference between power as brute force, even if it sometimes stabilized over time, and as an institutionalized authority. The former type of exercise of power has the effect of increasing over time the anger and the disappointment of the "excluded", i.e. of those individuals or groups who are not part of the dominant class or coalition, nor are linked to it in any way. They would be willing to use any means to get rid of those in power, and they might do so as soon as the conditions of the regime make the recourse to violence easy and offer a new opportunity for social mobilization. Political parties, the bureaucracy, the military and police forces are certainly important elements of the organization of a political regime. Nonetheless, they are mere channels through which the regime perpetuates its control over the society, and the power incumbents may exercise their brute force. As soon as these channels and the organizational control of consent lose their effectiveness, the "outsiders" are able to mobilize more easily as an opposition force, the regime is challenged in its foundations and the cumulative outcome of events can lead to violent conflict and to the "revolutionary" overthrow of the existing regime[50].

The outbreak of a revolution would not be, therefore, merely the effect of the reduced state capacity, as argued by Tilly, but rather the consequence of the absent or rapidly declining level of institutionalization of its power and authority. Indeed, only a congruous level of institutionalization gives any guarantee to those who are excluded from power, because it limits the range of the action of the power incumbents and above all it ensures some chance of replacing them as power incumbents. The notion of relative autonomy of the State, as put forward by Skocpol, captures quite well the meaning of political institutionalization, as it implies that the roles of authority, the resources attached to them and the dynamics of interaction between these roles (i.e., the arenas of the institutional confrontation) are relatively independent from the individuals who control them temporarily.

Those who are excluded from power may redirect their support to a different fraction of the political class, without resorting to violence. The possibility of revolution is more remote where the political power discloses a relatively high level of institutionalization. The autonomy

[50] Cfr. Giuseppe Ieraci, *Il crollo dei regimi non democratici,* cit., and *Fallen Idols,* cit.

of the political institutions from their incumbents becomes the ultimate guarantee for those who are excluded from power.

Current theories of revolution do not escape two major pitfalls. Firstly, there is not a clear distinction between the forms of the exercise of power. Consequently, might is mistaken for institutionalized power or authority. This observation should prompt social and political research to move towards the investigation of the causes preventing the institutionalization of power, and similarly of those that determine its decline. A revolution is much less likely to happen where the conditions for institutionalization prevail. In this case, the radius of political power is clearly defined and its action is foreseeable. Moreover, the transmission of power is the first and possibly the only target of the challengers, because its seizure guarantees the temporary control over the institutional roles, which make decisions possible.

Secondly, the concept of revolution recurrently employed in social sciences is holistic in its nature. This character is probably determined by the confusion between brute strength (might) and institutionalized power (authority). In fact, the violent nature of revolutionary conflict is because it is a ultimate challenge to the holders of a poorly institutionalized power. The challengers aim at founding a new political community, which will finally ensure them the access to the political power denied before. This is the reason why a revolution appears to the observer as an event that turns the world upside down, resulting in extensive impacts on both the social and political structure of a community. Once again, the effect is mistaken for a cause. The impulse and the attempt to build a new community are not the primary causes of the revolutionary outburst, but rather the effect of an unlimited exercise of power and of the unlikelihood of its regular and foreseeable transmission, which is the effect of the lack of institutionalization of this political power.