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**ОБРАЩАЯСЬ К КУЛЬТУРЕ:
ТРУДНОСТИ СТРУКТУРАЛИСТСКОГО ПОДХОДА
В ИЗУЧЕНИИ РЕВОЛЮЦИЙ***

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**BRINGING CULTURE BACK IN: THE QUAGMIRES OF THE
STRUCTURALIST APPROACH IN THE STUDY OF REVOLUTIONS**

В статье рассматриваются работы Ш. Эйзенштадта, Д. Голдстоуна и Д. Форэна, посвященные изучению революций, выделяются преимущества и основные выводы теорий, выдвинутые тремя авторами. Я стремлюсь выявить различия между работами упомянутых авторов и работами других признанных теоретиков в данной области, фокусируясь на особенностях их подходов к изучению идеологии и культуры. В то же время в статье отмечается, что сама попытка сосредоточиться на цивилизационной и идеологической динамике в исследовании революций, на разнообразных подходах к проблематике и преимуществах современной полемики о необходимости исследовать культуру наравне с теориями революции, содержит дефекты, которые сужают рамки и ограничивают широту теоретического развития в области теорий революции.

The paper tries to discuss the works of S.N. Eisenstadt, Jack A. Goldstone and John Foran concerning the study of revolutions, highlighting the advantages and the main findings of the theories advanced by the three authors. I try to highlight the distinctions between the works of the aforementioned authors and other prominent theorists in the field, focusing on their particular approaches to the studies of ideology and culture. At the same time, the paper tries to underline that within the appeal of focusing on civilizational and ideological dynamics in

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the study of revolutions, the different approaches to the matter and the merits of the contemporary debate on the necessity of studying culture alongside theories of revolution lie several pitfalls and shortcomings that limit the scope and width of the theoretical development in the field of revolution theories.

Ключевые слова: революция, культура, цивилизация, цивилизационная динамика, идеология, теория революции.

Keywords: revolution, culture, civilization, civilizational dynamics, ideology, theory of revolution.

The study focuses on the works of S.N. Eisenstadt, Jack A. Goldstone and John Foran concerning theories of revolution, trying to assert the difference between their approaches to the study at hand and the other structural theories. At the same time, the study tries to underline the main arguments for a study of revolution more attentive to the problems posed by civilization, culture or ideology, emphasizing nevertheless the dangers lying behind cultural structuralism.

The study of revolutions and the numerous adjacent theories of revolutions is one of the major focal points in social theory — the theoretical debates pertaining to the explaining and understanding of such phenomena encompassing several „hot spots” of sociological theory: the nature of social change (revolutions being considered a foremost case of profound, rapid and all-encompassing transformation), the agent-structure dilemma etc. Within the vast field of theories of revolution nevertheless, one can discern, as theorists argue, several different approaches to the study of culture and ideology. Within the “generational” framework that theorists discuss the evolution of the study of revolutions (Goldstone 2001: 139; Foran 1993: 1), the advent of a “fourth” generation of theorists that tries to focus on cultural, identity and discursive practices in order to circumvent the limitations of the structuralist approach to the study of revolution has been considered one of the most important developments in the field. Nevertheless, as I try to point out, the reaction to matters of culture, civilization and identity has for a long time been one of the major contention points within the theories of revolution, positions varying from a total rejection of the emphasis on ideology (Skocpol 1979), to a lukewarm accommodation of discursive practices and ideology (Tilly 1978) and a more asserting view that considers the prominent role cultures play in the revolutionary dynamic (Foran 2005).

S.N. Eisenstadt and the Study of Civilization and Revolutions

S.N. Eisenstadt’s approach to the study of revolutions is not uncommon among the “third” generation of revolutionary theorists — his starting point is illustrating the “ideal-type” of the revolution and comparing other instances of violent and rapid social change to it (in order to observe either the absence or the presence of processes of social change). Although this perspective is not necessarily uncommon among representatives of the “structuralist” wave, the way in which Eisenstadt contextualizes his approach makes his theoretical approach unique among other structuralists. On the one hand, Eisenstadt underlines that the importance of “great revolutions” (subjected to comparative historical analysis by theorists such as Brinton, Moore, Pettee, Edwards,

Skocpol and others) is highlighted by what he calls “the image of a true revolution” (Eisenstadt 1978: 2) which encompasses violent political regime change, a brusque “modernization” of the social life as a result of the major changes revolution brings in most institutional spheres, a radical break with the pre-revolutionary past and the heavy influence ideology plays in the drafting and enacting of revolutionary policies.

On the other hand, Eisenstadt considers that the focus other theorists place on the violent nature of the political conflict omnipresent in the “great revolutions” they tend to study (which remains nevertheless a prominent characteristic of the ideal-type he refers to) overshadows several other important components of the phenomenon he is trying to study (Eisenstadt 1978: 8). Eisenstadt considers that violent political conflict is a direct result of wider processes of structural and civilizational transformation which bear a direct influence on the enacting of social change (and revolution is first and foremost a form of social change and not of social conflict). His theoretical model endeavors therefore to isolate the precise characteristics of revolution that differentiate it from several other resembling phenomena (protests, rebellions, change processes) and to identify the structural conditions of “pure” revolutions.

There are two epistemological premises to Eisenstadt’s enterprise. On the one hand, he emphasizes that the objective of his structuralist frame of reference lies not in explaining the transition from the pre-social to the social level of organization of the human life, but to explain the manner in which society (as an assembly of rules that make human interaction predictable) continues to exist (Eisenstadt 1978: 20). At the same time, his structuralist outlook emphasizes that dysfunctional aspects are inherent to social organization, because there is a permanent tension between “the organizational mechanisms of the social division of labor and the acceptance of social order” (Eisenstadt 1978: 21).

Within this theoretical framework, Eisenstadt identifies four types of society: primitive, traditional, modern and neo-patrimonial societies. His classification of types of social change emphasizes nevertheless the characteristics of the societies within which the change takes place — it is the structure of each society that defines the society itself and the type of social change it goes through and not necessarily the characteristics of the change process itself. Primitive societies are therefore subjected to changes consisting of the change of relative positions inside the system, the establishment of new units outside the territory of the initial unit and changes that encompass a process of centralization.

Traditional societies undergo segregative, coalescent and exceptional social changes (Eisenstadt 1978: 73), whereas revolutionary change is a characteristic of modern societies. Its features are not the the scope or intensity of rebellions and protests (as opposed to change in traditional societies), but the tight connection between protest movements, political struggle and the symbols articulated by the political struggle and the institutional structure of society, the protest movements and, last but not least, their structural consequences (Eisenstadt 1978: 173).

Modern revolutions are enacted by coalitions more heterogenous and diverse than those that enact change in traditional societies. At the same time, the idea of political legitimacy moves beyond the simple framing of alternative views on social organization (revolution is a particular type of change that manages to bring together both the idea

of a return to an original order more just than the existing one and the idea of a general progress of society through the enactment of deliberate changes). Violence becomes therefore a product of both the new symbolic construction of an alternative social order and a direct consequence of the deliberate and conscientious character of revolution (unlike change in traditional societies, which is conditioned and determined by three types of structural influence: the structure of society itself, the characteristics of the ecological environment that surrounds the social systems and the lack of a deliberate cultural model of agency-enabled social change). Revolutions result in the increase of structural differentiations and specialization, the development of an industrial/ semi-industrial market economy, the articulation of social stratification and social mobility systems, the apparition and development of centralized and bureaucratic political systems (Eisenstadt 1978: 178).

The relevance of Eisenstadt's approach to the study of culture and civilization as a hallmark of revolutionary and social change lies not necessarily in the causal model he proposes, which is not manifestly different from the ones other theorists such as Skocpol, Barrington Moore, Ellen Kay Trimberger advance. Eisenstadt admits that inter-state competition and warfare play an important role in the intensification of pressure the political regime has to cope with (Eisenstadt 1978: 195). The problem he advances is that the model of overlapping internal and external conditions does not explain two empirical facts: how the transition to modern society was possible in the absence of revolution (in Switzerland and in the Scandinavian states) and why the modern revolution (transformed into an instrument) was unable to "produce" modern societies outside the Western World. The answer lies in the "combination between the structural and cultural characteristics of the societies in which the modern revolutions took place" and "the specific historical conditions that served as the framework within which the potentialities for revolution and concomitant social transformation became actualized" (Eisenstadt 1978: 198). Hence, the specific combination of cultural and structural characteristics in the Western World is defined by the high degree of convergence between the protest movements and between the protest movements and political conflict; by the high degree of convergence between changes in multiple institutional spheres. The historical context that activates these conditions is the transition from the traditional model of society to the modern one (the development of an open model of authority and social stratification — classes being more permeable than ethnic or feudal hierarchies) and the incorporation of societies inside an emergent international system subjected itself to a continuous process of change.

Demographics and Culture — Jack Goldstone's Approach to the Study of Revolutions

Goldstone starts his analysis of the revolutionary phenomenon from two major assumptions: modern states are heavily influenced in their dynamic and transformation by demographic elements (his work focuses at the same time on the micro-dynamics of different population sub-categories: young people, landless peasants, members of the elite groups that cannot inherit the elite status belonging to their parents) and building a "conjunctural" theoretical model of state break-down, which must account for multiple economic, social, political and *cultural* dynamics (Goldstone 1991: XXIII). The four "conditions" that make revolution possible are the financial crisis of the state

(the increasing gap between the state's revenues and its normal expenses), the severe divides and cleavages between the elites, determined by the competition for the appropriation of the main power positions, the existence of a high mobilization potential as a result of increasing discontent (influenced by the patterns that favor mobilization and action, as well as the increasing proportion of young people in the total population) and the accentuation of "heterodox ideas and religions" (Goldstone 1991: XXIV).

Thus, Goldstone notices that history observes two extended "waves" of state breakdown — the first one reaching its climax in the second half of the XVIIth century and the second one becoming manifest in the latter half of the XIXth century (divided by almost a century — 1660–1760 — of political stability). In stark opposition to what he considers a linear model of change (a transition in both qualitative and quantitative terms from one stage to another, whom he attributes to the visions of Marx and Durkheim), Goldstone considers that social change is the result of both cyclical (the process of state centralization, urbanization, the development of market economy) and linear processes of change.

Goldstone's thesis is an attempt to synthesize the Theda Skocpol and Charles Tilly's theories of revolution, adding to their apparatus two new independent variables — the demographic factor and the influence of what Goldstone calls "heterogeneous" cultures and religions. Hence, Goldstone admits that there is an innate tension in every society within the elite group, a form of manifest competition for positions of power, status and the distribution of resources — a perspective which is consonant with Charles Tilly's perspective on revolutions (one has to note at the same time that Goldstone does not apply the more detailed theoretical models of Tilly pertaining to mobilization and collective action). Moreover, revolutions occur in the same causal and conjectural manner which Skocpol posits — revolutions are the consequence of the simultaneous occurrence of several systemic conditions. The whole theoretical scheme is however deeply influenced by demographics, which Goldstone considers an independent variable (the most important social dynamics are all the result of an increasing population). Thus, by the middle of the 17th century, the state's financial expenditures are increasing as a direct result of population growth (armies become larger, prices increase, wars become harder to fund — Goldstone notes for example that the English revolution occurred after a short war the monarch had to wage against Scotland, a relatively underdeveloped country in military terms). At the same time, there is a manifest gap between the state's increasing need of revenues and the "antiquate" means of taxation (in an age of inflation, taxation operates per quantity and not proportionally in a century marked by inflation). Furthermore, the increase in population (which follows the same general trends within the elite groups and the general population) determines increased competitions within the elite (an increasing number of young nobles who cannot access privileged positions via inheritance resort to royal patronage, which adds a complimentary stress on the state's already strained finances). Simultaneously, the increase of the youth's proportion in the general population (in both the cases of 17th century England and late 18th century France, the 26–35 cohort is the largest one in their entire history up to that particular moment) leads to the appearance of new patterns for mobilization (Goldstone 1991: 140).

In Goldstone's terms, it is the material factors that play an important part in the process of state break-down. State break-down is the causal consequence of the inadequacy of social and political arrangements facing an extended period of demographic growth (social institutions are unable to cope with the political, fiscal and social pressure determined by the increase in population). It is at this precise point that Goldstone tries to integrate culture into his theory — the ideological and cultural factors play a role not in the state's break-down, but in the reconstruction of the state (Goldstone 1991: 29)

Goldstone argues that one of the main problems with Skocpol's theory is that it does not take culture and ideology into account. On the contrary, Skocpol adamantly argues that ideology does not play a determining role in the whole revolutionary process (Skocpol 1979: 168–174). Goldstone considers, appealing to Sewell (Sewell 1985: 58) that cultural and ideological differences are responsible for the different outcomes of different revolutions. At the same time, in the same manner as Eisenstadt, Goldstone considers that the investigation of ideology and culture explains not only the direct revolutionary consequences (the radicalization of the revolutionary regime, for example), but also the unique characteristics of the early modern revolutions he studies: the fact that their occurrence is limited to the Western hemisphere and the sustained rhythm of development the post-revolutionary states have managed to sustain (Goldstone 1991: 419).

The difference that explains the occurrence of revolutions in the early modern period of history in the Western world lies, according to Goldstone, not in the social, economical and political conditions which are influenced by the same general demographic trends (it is important to note that, according to Goldstone's survey, most states must cope with crises brought by the gap between the inadequate social and political arrangements and the challenges posed by the increasing population), but in the analysis of the cultural and religious norms specific to each state and society. While admitting that there is a quasi-natural tendency in revolutions for the radicalization of the political scene (the existence of a marginal part of the elite, whose social progression is blocked, leads its members to adopt radical views challenging the fundamentals of the Old Regime, which enable them at the same time to outplay the moderates who initially take power after the overthrow of the old authorities), Goldstone emphasizes that the radicalization trend is a political discourse that evolves from radical criticism of the Old Regime to the criticism of the moderates' inability of dealing with the structural consequences of state crisis, finally embracing nationalism and belligerent overtones, as the message and the promise of redistribution does not ensure the perpetual legitimacy of the radical regime (Goldstone 1991: 427).

However, the cultural differences that ensure the incidence of revolution and its different outcomes are those expressed by the different essential characteristics Western revolutionary ideology and culture entail. Goldstone points to the distinction set by Skocpol and Swidler between "ideologies" (understood as "values, meanings and symbols that are self-consciously offered in contest with other sets of values, meanings and symbols") and "cultural frameworks" ("taken for granted, background set of values, meanings, and symbols that are embodied in the dominant social, economic, religious, and political habits and institutions of a society") (Goldstone 1991: 445).

The main distinction between the Western and Oriental cultural framework is the presence of an “eschatological element” derived from the Judeo-Christian tradition that entails a secular vision of history, as opposed to the traditional cyclical view of human and societal existence. Consequently, during the periods of state crisis that affect states during the 17th, 18th and 19th century, the Chinese or Middle Eastern ideological response consists not of an appeal to the creation of a new social arrangement and political organization, but to a stricter adherence to the traditional norms and rules (Goldstone 1991: 449).

The preconditions for the ideological revolution (which is lacking in Japan, China or Turkey during the period Goldstone analyses) are the existence of a marginal elite that seeks not only to take power, but also to change the basic principles that ensured its marginalization and the existence of powerful eschatological elements that ensure the interpretation of the revolution not as a return to a “Golden Age” but as a first step in the creation of a “new, more virtuous society” (Goldstone, 1991: 449). The adjacent character of culture, as Goldstone uses the concept, manifestly rejects the autonomous status of culture — Goldstone criticizes Bourdieu and Giddens, considering that although their approach to culture manages to avoid the pitfalls of material determinism, their perspectives “are useless for long-term, causal historical explanation” (Goldstone 1991: 457). Human creativity, concedes Goldstone, is not constant, because it is stimulated especially in the intervals that precede revolutions, during social crises brought by material factors.

John Foran and Cultures of Resistance

John Foran’s analysis of revolutions has two objectives. On the one hand, Foran tries to build a theory to explain revolutions in the Third World, arguing that neither Huntington (who simply divides revolutions in Oriental and Occidental revolutions), nor Skocpol (whom Foran argues is concerned more with the dynamics of “agrarian empires”) are concerned with the dynamics of Third World states and societies. On the other hand, his approach to culture, which tries to integrate into his explanatory theoretical model what he calls “the political cultures of opposition”, which are to offer “a complex mediation between structure and action” (Foran 2005: 14). The integration of culture into the study of revolutions is meant, in Foran’s view, to complement the emphasis on structure.

The theoretical model he advances is, at first glance, another “conjunctural” approach to the study of revolutions. Five inter-relational factors constitute the causes of revolutions: a dependent path of development (which Foran adopts from Immanuel Wallerstein), the existence of an exclusionary, personalist or colonial state or open polity, the existence of manifest and effective political cultures of opposition, the revolutionary crisis, consisting of a major economic downturn and a world systemic opening (Foran 2005: 18).

The dependent development of a state consists of his integration into the global economy under conditions that manifestly shape its social structure — the underlying hypothesis Foran bases his study upon is that the conditions of dependent development are the cause of the severe discontent that fuel the leading classes and groups which eventually form the revolutionary coalitions (Foran 2005: 18). Consequently,

repressive, exclusionary and personalist states are at the origin of the repression of lower classes and exclude from political participation middle classes and economic elites (thereby favoring the formation of multi-class coalitions against the state (Foran 2005: 19).

The integration of political cultures of opposition into the theoretical model is meant to set a new light on agency, amidst the structuralist dominance in the field of theories of revolution (Foran 1997: 203–226). Basically, political cultures of opposition should offer a different perspective of extended grievances or discontent, without resorting to a structural-determinist explanation of their origin. In Foran's terms, "broad segments of many groups and classes must be able to articulate the experiences they are living through into effective and flexible analyses capable of mobilizing their own forces and building coalitions with others". The revolutionary transformation of cultures is essentially the result of a mix of organizational capacities, past experiences, culture and ideology (Foran 2005: 21).

But the political cultures of opposition and revolution are not necessarily a breakthrough or a step off the structuralist theoretical claims — as Foran readily admits, political cultures of opposition and revolution, although may make room for agency and meaning in the study of revolution, remain a by-product or a consequence of the larger structural dynamics: for John Foran, political cultures of resistance and opposition are a reaction to the "structural problems and inequalities entailed by dependent development and the repressive state" (Foran 2005: 22). All in all, of the five conditions Foran identifies as necessary for the occurrence of revolution, four are structurally determined (and remain outside the agent's power of action or decision), and only the elaboration of political cultures of resistance and opposition offers itself as a field for agency (and even under these conditions, although Foran credits it for being the "ingredient" that makes the difference between a revolution and a non-revolution, the political cultures in question remain reactions to the larger structural developments).

For Foran, political cultures of resistance and opposition are the meeting point of subjective experiences animated by the political involvement of agents, revolutionary discourses circulating in between revolutions and revolutionary groups and popular idioms which express the peoples' concerns in terms of justice, freedom or fairness, becoming a general phenomenon when people and groups organize themselves in networks and organizations actively trying to change the existing order (Foran 2008: 236).

Culture and revolution — the subaltern perspective

Eisenstadt, Goldstone and Foran point, albeit in different theoretical contexts, to the importance of integrating the study of culture into the wider field of theories of revolution. Eisenstadt and Goldstone insist that culture is important not only in the shaping of the revolution's characteristics, but is, at the same time, essential for analyzing the results of the revolutionary process. Both Eisenstadt and Goldstone's theories follow the footprints of Barrington Moore's work in the field of comparative study of revolutions, trying to offer alternative explanations for the particular historical development of the Western world, by focusing on the impact of the modern revolutions. Eisenstadt and Goldstone's main argument is that culture has a primordial role in

shaping the characteristics of the process of change these societies undergo and on the results of the social, political, economic and cultural transformation revolutions represent. On the other hand, Foran insists that the role of culture is instrumental for the occurrence of revolutions (becoming the necessary element in the structural conjunctural theoretical models he strives to build).

However, one has to not that in spite of the differences between the three authors' views on the importance and the role culture plays in the revolutionary dynamic, the place culture occupies remains nevertheless somewhat static. All three authors definitely use the concept of culture in a related sense, the major problem at hand being the way culture is defined and the role it plays in the aforementioned theories. Introducing culture in the study of revolutions tends to become in all three instances only a multiplication of the structural determining elements — to the extent that the concept is operationalized (which is a seldom occurrence), the influence of the economic and political structure is only added a new dimension, the cultural one. The structural causal sequence of the three theoretical models remains unchanged — we are not dealing only with economic, social and political structures, we have to deal with cultural structures too. Eisenstadt, Foran and Goldstone do not try to integrate culture into the study of revolutions; they make an effort to build the concept of a cultural structure (which operates in revolutions in the same over-deterministic manner in which material or institutional structures do). Of the three authors, only Foran tries to make room for agency into his theoretical scheme by addressing the problem of culture (but its somewhat reactive reaction to long-term and all-encompassing structural transformations, such as dependent development or the repressive and personalized regime, the world-systemic opening and so forth makes clear that the possibilities and limits of agency are clearly limited in his perspective). Nevertheless, in all three accounts, culture plays a secondary role. Although the authors appeal to culture in order to draw essential characteristics or conclusions in regard to the revolutionary phenomenon, the bulk of the theoretical explanation lies on the conjunctural structuralist model Eisenstadt, Goldstone and Foran employ. Culture, although used to explain essential characteristics, plays largely a secondary role, being conceptualized largely as another structure that limits and constrains the actions of the agent.

Basically, the researcher is facing two alternatives. On the one hand, “structuralizing” culture seems one of the ways out of the quagmire surrounding the relation between culture and revolutions. Francesca Poletta, for example, argues that the task of the researcher lies not in abandoning political “objective” structures in favor of the analysis of subjective perceptions, but in “investigating the objective resources and constraints determined by the dimension of political structure” (Poletta 2004: 97). Culture is therefore (in contrast with Foran’s hopes of making room for agency in revolution theories by discussing culture) not necessarily complementary with agency, intentionality and subjectivity. Although many structures have cultural origins, cultural structures complement the picture drawn by structuralist theories, by shedding light on aspects such as cultural norms, collective memories, constitutional dispositions in regard to the use of power and the role of political actors, institutions and processes (Poletta 2004: 108–109). The major problem with the structural culturalism Poletta proposes (which can be identified in the works of Eisenstadt, Goldstone and Foran) is

the elasticity of the whole theoretical construct — as Charles Kuzman points out, integrating culture into the already burdensome structuralist theoretical framework raises the question of prioritizing the explanatory mechanisms: “states matter, culture matters, social structure matters, accidents and history matters, everything matters” (Kuzman 2004: 113)

The second option of the researcher is building the concept of culture from a different epistemological perspective. If culture is perceived and conceptualized not as another structure, independent of the agent’s perceptions and subjectivity, a different perspective on revolutions may be brought forth. Eric Selbin’s perspective of grand narratives or stories of revolution that shape and frame the past, present and future, empowering and enabling people to challenge authority and change the world they live in is but one example of analyzing culture from a different theoretical perspective. As long as conceptualizing culture in the study of revolutions is deemed important, one needs to take into account that culture may serve as a starting point for a theoretical and epistemological refinement of theories of revolution — in Foran’s terms, culture may serve as the basis and the pretext for discussing agency and subjectivity.

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