A Fifth Generation of Revolutionary Theory is Yet to Come

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Abstract Despite revolution's recent return to the world stage, the progress of revolutionary theory has markedly stalled. While some have argued that recent work on the 2011 Arab Spring constitutes a new, misguided 'Fifth Generation' of theory, I show this claim to be misplaced, demonstrating the remarkable continuity between foundational fourth-generation scholarship and present-day analyses. Furthermore, I critically analyse the theoretical, methodological and professional obstacles which fourth-generation theory has encountered, concluding that scholars must move beyond the fourth generation if we are to surmount them. Finally, I consider the theoretical, methodological and ethical prospects of a true fifth generation of revolutionary theory.

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It would be hard to call oneself a revolutionary theorist without acknowledging the importance of overturning old paradigms. It is in this regard that Jaime Allinson (2019) most certainly carried forward some revolutionary energy in his recent endeavour to prove that a fifth generation of revolutionary theory has come and passed[‡]. In his article for the *Journal of Historical Sociology*, Allinson engages with three books which he claims belong to a new generation of theory: Asef Bayat's (2017) *Revolution without Revolutionaries*; Donatella Della Porta's (2016) *Where did the Revolution Go?;* and Daniel Ritter's (2015) *The Iron Cage of Liberalism*. He uses these books as core evidentiary markers for his proposed new generation, and deploys a series of insightful critiques to build a case for rejecting it altogether.

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[‡] See Jaime Allinson's review essay in The Journal of Historical Sociology, Volume 32, Issue 1, pp. 142-151, to which this article responds.

In what follows, I advance an alternative hypothesis, contending that our problems instead lie with an overly-long fourth generation of theory, from which the field has so-far failed to evolve. I show Allinson's central claim to be ultimately misplaced, and that his critiques more readily apply to the tail-end of fourth-generation revolutionary theory. I then move to consider why this generation of revolutionary theory has experienced so much trouble since its inception in the early 1990s (Foran, 1993), and argue that we are currently experiencing its death throes. Finally, in light of the anticipated downturn of the fourth generation of revolutionary theory, I offer some ambitions and speculative suggestions for a true *fifth generation* of revolutionary theory, one that is yet to come.

No Fifth Generation, Yet.

The claim that a fifth generation of revolutionary theory has not only already arisen, but has already outlived its purpose is a monumentally bold one. Despite containing many astute observations, Jaime Allinson's (2019) recent argument to this effect does not adequately support such a claim. Instead, it mostly targets valid criticisms against newer participants in a prior generation of revolutionary theory, whose analyses are not manifestly different from those we have seen in the past. In the process of making his argument, Allinson fatally conflates these fourth-generation theories with his proposed new generation. Despite this crucial flaw, Allinson's corollary argument— that revolutionary theory needs to move on from its present theoretical fixations— is still highly compelling and well supported.

Allinson (2019:143) is keen to impress that his proposed new generation is chiefly distinguished by having incorrectly identified the 2011 Arab Revolts as "a new object of study— that of non-violent, political revolutions." I would contend that such an object of study is precisely the domain of revolutionary theory's *fourth* generation, which cut its teeth on the analysis of the array of post-Soviet cases in which "there was no need for the revolutionary leaders taking power in the capital to spread their revolution by force," (Goldstone, 2001: 143). The continuity between this perspective and more recent revolutionary theory is striking and explicit. Only a few years ago, George Lawson (2015: 466) remarked that the Arab Revolts "share a familiar revolutionary heritage… in terms of wider currents of revolutionary theory," noting that they "sit largely within the framework established by the 1989 negotiated revolutions that ousted state socialism in Central and Eastern Europe." A similar continuity

is seen in the texts Allinson recruits for his proposed fifth generation. Indeed, Allinson notes that Bayat's (2017) analysis in *Revolutions without Revolutionaries* considers the Arab revolutions to be '*refolutions'*. This term is in fact derived from analyses of the post-Soviet revolutionary wave, in which the revolutionary ideal— tarred by the brush of Communist rule— was considered so politically toxic that the very concept of revolution was either side-lined or consciously rejected during the processes of regime-overthrow and reconstruction (Garton Ash, 1989). If we are to take Ritter (2015), Bayat (2017) and Della Porta's (2016) objects of study to be "non-violent, political revolutions," as Allinson proposes, then they are most certainly engaged in fourth-generation revolutionary analysis.

Nonetheless, Allinson is certainly correct to suspect that our object of study has changed, and he is right to identify the particular importance of the events of 2011 for future revolutionary theory. The Arab Spring was not only a new 'revolutionary wave', but was also emblematic of a distinctively different generation of revolutions. The remarkable subsidence of revolutionary movements in the revolts which characterised the 2011 revolutions has shown, in stark terms, the poverty of existing theoretical perspectives. Who would have thought, following the example set by the 1989 revolutions and the subsequent Colour Revolutions, that the next revolutionary wave would be carried through by a suite of fleeting revolutionaries who neither knew who their 'leaders' *were*, nor, in fact, whether they had any?

Many of today's revolutions neither resemble the classical revolutions of the past, nor those of the non-violent post-Soviet wave. They are, as Allinson (2019:148) rightly notes, often "restricted to the momentary," easily crushed, and particularly vulnerable to counter-revolution. This, in many ways, is their identifying feature: while the past generation of revolutions were characterised by their non-violence, newer revolutions are characterised by their fragility (we could even collectively call them the '*fragile revolutions'*). Some theorists have even deemed them so fragile as to reject their revolutionary prospects altogether. The political theorist John Dunn, for example, contends that since 1989, all instances of so-called 'revolution' have simply been processes of 'regime collapse,' lacking the strong cast-list of professional revolutionaries required to carry out genuinely transformative change (Abrams & Dunn, 2017; Abrams, 2018).

Despite the importance of these observations, I would affirm that the character of revolutionary waves *must be distinguished* from generations of revolutionary theory. While I agree with Allinson that our object of study has decidedly changed, I would also stress that our analytical framework is yet to develop in tandem: current analyses still broadly regard the most recent wave of revolutions as if they were simply failing to follow the *marche générale* of the post-Soviet revolts, rather than as characterised by their own distinctive paths and dynamics. In this sense, a novel generation of revolutions is being parsed with an established generation of theory.

Indeed, when we examine the intellectual positions which Allinson ascribes to his candidate generation, it becomes quite clear that his proposed 'fifth-generation' analyses are in fact characterised by fourth-generation traits. For example, Allinson (2019, 143) contends that his candidate generation has shifted its emphasis to consider "the relationship between intentions, behaviour and structure in revolutions." This outlook is strikingly similar to Foran's observation that "social structure itself must be studied…. by reference to intentional actions." (1993:10), and Goldstone's (2001:139) argument that, in addition to structure, revolutionary theory should "incorporate leadership, ideology, and processes of identification with revolutionary movements as key elements in the production of revolution." A similar challenge can be made to Allinson's (2019: 143) suggestion that his new generation of theorists are distinguished by no longer considering revolution to be "a discrete event, capable of being situated on a continuum between social and political change and correlated with the presence or absence of other pre-existing factor[s]." Allinson instead claims that they have opted for a relational approach to the phenomenon. This is quite a peculiar claim, as the relational approach to which Allinson alludes was considered the defining leap made by "a new fourth generation of scholarship on revolutions and collective action," (Emirbayer & Goodwin 1996, 374) and it has proven to be an agenda to which fourth-generation theorists have consistently returned to over the past three decades (Emirbayer & Goodwin 1996; Parsa, 2000; Goodwin, 2001; Goldstone, 2004; Lawson, 2004, 2016, 2019).

Finally, Allinson (2019:143) makes the argument that his proposed new theoretical generation is distinguished from the past generation by its claim that "revolutions should be understood as processes"— a series of unfolding events— rather than "singular units that can be correlated with other

phenomena." This is, again, a well-established fourth-generation perspective: emphasised in Goldstone's revolutionary theorising (2001:152, 2009); established as a cornerstone of the relational approach (Emirbayer, 1997: 281, 304, 309); developed considerably across Charles Tilly's (1978, 1995) life's work; and taking centre stage in Foran's (2005) analysis of 'Third World Revolutions'. It has been most recently returned to by Lawson (2016) and Ritter (2015) as a direct extension of this legacy.

The Languishing Fourth Generation

Part of the reason that Allinson may have been tempted to declare more recent work part of a new, fifth generation is the disparity between what fourth-generation theorists have aspired to achieve, and what they have actually accomplished. While fourth-generation theory has maintained a relatively consistent overall ontological and epistemological aspiration, its analytical contents are much more varied. In fact, in contrast to prior generations, the fourth generation of revolutionary theory is a decidedly troubled one. Despite featuring a plethora of insightful and highly interesting studies, it has ultimately failed to deliver on the early overall promises made by its proponents (Foran, 1993; Goldstone, 2001). More than a quarter of a century since its inception, the desire to move on seems entirely reasonable.

There are, I argue, three principal obstacles to fourth-generation progress: the overambitious attempt to replace theorising with modelling; the related desire to cover too many variables at once; and the field's displacement by overlapping disciplines.

A Model Trajectory, Unfulfilled.

Fourth-generation revolutionary theory has been characterised by a variety of notable issues which present quite regularly in the associated literature. The most central of these is the aim of fourth-generation theorists to simultaneously reject bold theorising in favour of iterative work, while also aspiring to build overarching models applicable to the total variety of revolutions across time and space.

When John Foran (1993:16) first heralded the prospects of a new, 'fourth' generation of revolutionary theory, he called for the replacement of grand theory with 'conjunctural modelling', through which periodic, careful case studies would gradually refine overall models of revolution, characterised by multiple facets and variables. Foran's intention was to pioneer a turn away from mono-causal master-

theories in favour of "models more complex and multicausal than the often one-sided arguments" seen in prior work. In his manifesto for revolutionary theory's fourth generation, Jack Goldstone (2001: 144,172) espoused similar ambitions, declaring that "a full understanding of revolutions must take account of the plasticity of elite and popular alignments, of the processes of revolutionary mobilization and leadership, and of the variable goals and outcomes of revolutionary actors and events." He also declared that "it will treat stability as problematic and focus on the conditions that sustain regimes" while also leaving "a prominent role for issues of identity and ideology, gender, networks and leadership."

Foran and Goldstone's early aspirations for the fourth generation were certainly ambitious. They had called for the wholesale rejection of traditional theorising in favour of a new model-centric approach. This new approach— were it to succeed— should yield nothing short of a predictive model of revolutions, applicable to an ever increasing historical and geographical variety of cases. To these theorists' credit, both engaged in concerted attempts to build such a model for some time, before moving on to other projects (Foran, 2005; Goldstone, 1991; 1995). While Foran and Goldstone's aspirations went on to shape the trajectory of the fourth generation, other fourth-generation theorists expressed substantial concern about this theoretical course of action. For example, Emirbayer and Goodwin (1996: 360) took a particularly scathing line of critique against Goldstone's (1995) own model, which was supposed to "successfully predict, at least in principle, any and all revolutions." Crushingly, they lambasted the model for ignoring agency, psychology, emotional commitments, culture and politics. They argued that, under Goldstone's model, "an outside observer need know nothing about a society's cultural systems or extant political ideologies in order to predict whether or not a revolution will occur there…[and] merely scour the local landscape for palpable signs of state crisis, elite conflict, and the possibility of popular protest," (Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1996: 361).

The daunting task of fulfilling Foran and Goldstone's aspirations has invited a peculiar tendency towards introspection among subsequent fourth-generation theorists, making it the most self-monitored generation of theory in the academic study of revolution.[1] This is at least in part a consequence of the coincidence of the idea of theoretical generations with the emergence of a self-consciously 'fourth'

generation, but also reflective of the recognisable difficulty of achieving the aims set out for it (Lawson, 2016). Indeed, many of those studying revolution have declined to engage in such a task, and have instead engaged in more atomistic analyses led by a smaller number of empirical cases, often discursively disconnected from one-another, and theoretically fractured (Beck, 2018). This process has ushered in an era of fragmented analyses which, though highly worthwhile in their own right, have done little to advance the agenda of fourth-generation scholarship as a whole.

Despite its decline, a recent coalition of scholars have made some praiseworthy attempts to provide life-support to the otherwise faltering fourth generation. Some, such as Colin Beck (2014), have attempted to move away from classical conjunctural modelling in favour of the development of a multi-dimensional meta-framework. Others, such as Daniel Ritter (2015) have attempted to focus on the processual and international dynamics of fourth-generation theory. What is common to both Ritter and Beck's approaches is that they refrain from making naturalistic, predictive claims beyond the realms of the cases they examine, in subtle rejection of the conjunctural approach. Ritter (2015:223) is especially doubtful of the enduring nature of his finding that the success rates of predominantly non-violent and unarmed revolutions have been strengthened by a liberal world order. He instead anticipates that the international pendulum may "swing back and make violent struggle against authoritarian states once more the revolutionary's strategy of choice."[2] Still others, such as George Lawson (2016) have attempted to usefully redirect early aspirations in an effort to get the fourth generation back on track, all while expressing a degree of scepticism as to the prospects of the overall project. Nonetheless, amidst their admiration for the landmark theorists of the fourth generation, reading the work of this newer cohort belies a certain sense of discomfort with their predecessors' endeavours, which I suspect will eventually lead to their breaking with the fourth generation project.

Despite the ground-breaking work of its early theorists (Foran, 1993; Goldstone, 2001), there was, in my view, something mistaken in the fourth generation's attempt to reject bold theory. This move was in part justified by the notion that past bold theoretical endeavours were somehow irreconcilable and exclusionary, each seeking to promote their own idealised universal cause (Foran, 1993: 16-17 Goldstone, 1980, 2001:171-172). To the contrary, prior to the advent of fourth generation theory, the

'bold theorists' such as Skocpol (1979), Gurr (1970), Tilly (1978) and Trimberger (1978), consistently emphasised the complexity and contingency of the revolutionary phenomena they studied. These theorists often sought to argue in favour of the primacy of one factor or another, but did so on the basis of an assumption that other variables also possessed substantial casual force. Their efforts were more often corrective and exploratory than they were imperialistic. Skocpol sought to re-centre attention on the State, which she felt had been sorely neglected. Gurr sought to reassert the primacy of psychological factors, which he rightly observed were lacking in the analysis of revolution. Tilly sought to draw attention to longer-running political processes, and Trimberger sought to illustrate the important roles played by revolutionary elites. This is to say that these bold theorists engaged in in-depth investigations of a limited number of variables so as to shed light upon the complex relationships between that variable and revolution's other dimensions.[3] This kind of analytical depth has been comparatively neglected in the bulk of fourth generation theory which, in its efforts to account for an exhaustive list of variables, has all too often lost sight of the logic of their operation.

Co-occurring with the rejection of bold theory, was an ongoing shift in the structure of revolutionary inquiry, characterised by an analytical bias towards geographically and temporally homogenous cases (Beck, 2018), and a corresponding rejection of difference-based comparison by revolutionary analysts. This had a deleterious effect on the advancement of the very agenda to which fourth-generation theorists aspired, producing— as Beck puts it in his (2018) review of the field— "the conditions under which knowledge accumulation slows." This shift has played a serious role in dampening the field's overall theoretical progress. Because of the sheer variability of revolutionary phenomena, theoretical development must be situated in the analysis of fundamentally different cases, rather than a suite of highly similar ones. If an idea is borne out across space, culture and time, then it may well be common to a great many revolutions. The same cannot be said for something identified amongst a narrow set of historically, geographically or culturally delimited cases. While, in principle, similar cases can yield theoretical benefits where only a very small and strictly controlled set of variables meaningfully differ between them, in practice, this situation essentially never occurs, even between cases which are as tightly geographically and historically delimited as possible.[4]

Academic Displacement

While internal maladies have played an important role in the disappointing progress of the fourth generation, its lack of clear advancement has also been a consequence of the displacement of revolutionary study by other, much more populous fields, most particularly the fields of Social Movement Studies and Democratisation. While it is undeniable that both of these fields have produced highly worthwhile insights about certain elements of revolutions, they do not ultimately regard revolution as their object of study, but instead consider it as containing a sub-form of some other category of events. In such fields, revolutionary processes are instead regarded as an instance of 'contentious politics'; revolutionary movements are considered 'revolutionary social movements', and 'revolutionary outcomes' are reconceived as cases of 'democratic transition'.

The entry of social movement studies into the domain traditionally occupied by revolutionary theory began as a series of modest observations that some of the features of revolutionary movements resemble those of social movements (e.g. Goldstone, 1998), and that revolutionary processes shared commonalities with the political processes seen in social movements (e.g. Tilly, 1995). This convergence was unsurprising, as the two fields have always enjoyed a considerable overlap[5], owing to the tendency of sociologists of revolution to occasionally moonlight as scholars of (or indeed participants in) social movements. As time went on, even more ambitious attempts to fuse the two fields were made, and it was claimed that that revolutionary processes and social movements were in fact part of a single overarching category of phenomena known as "Contentious Politics" (McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly, 2001). Captained by three highly experienced, world-leading scholars— Charles Tilly, Sidney Tarrow, and Doug McAdam— the 'Dynamics of Contention' (2001) project attempted to create a new field of study which paid careful attention to the relational dynamics, mechanisms, processes and episodes which recurred across a wide array of political phenomena, such as disaffiliated protests, elections, ethnic conflicts, civil wars, and terrorism. Chief among the project's targets for agglomeration, however, was what its proponents perceived as "a largely separate specialty dedicated to the comparative study of revolution:" at that time the chief vehicle for fourth-generation revolutionary theory (McAdam and Tarrow, 2011: 2).

While McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly's desire for a relational approach mirrored many of the concerns of fourth-generation theorists, much of the work which the trio dedicated to the relational analysis of common mechanisms, episodes and processes occurring across political phenomena was not as warmly embraced as they had hoped. While the project successfully expanded the territory of the social movement field to include revolutions and civil wars, its central attempt to encourage scholars to think about dynamic relational mechanisms rather than fixed variables was comparatively less successful (McAdam & Tarrow, 2011).[6]

While the conceptual waters of revolutionary theory's fourth generation have been contested by efforts to reconceive revolutionary processes as a subcategory within social movement theory, efforts to analyse revolutionary outcomes as a subtype of democratisation have had similar effects. Such tendencies have been evidenced in the attempts to recast the 1989 and 2011 revolutionary waves as democratisation attempts, rather than revolutionary cases (Huntingdon, 1991; Brown, 2013; Stepan & Linz, 2013). This effort has proven more to the chagrin of fourth-generation theorists than had the Contentious Politics project, leading to allegations that "the link between democratisation and revolution [was] routinely abused by transitologists" (Lawson 2008, 157).

These shifts in the field have resulted in considerable ramifications for the cohesion of fourth-generation theory. Casting an eye over the work published about recent revolutions leads one to realise that many such publications now couch their analyses not in terms of revolutionary theory, but in terms of either social movement or democratisation studies (e.g. Jumet, 2017; Stepan & Linz, 2013). While there is much to praise about these two fields, and the considerable progress they have made while revolutionary theory has comparatively stalled, it cannot be denied that these fields pursue markedly different objects of analysis. Revolutions are occasionally incident in democratisation processes, and they often feature social movements, but within the study of these two phenomena they are ultimately only fringe cases. It is thus no surprise the knowledge produced from such approaches has tended to tell us much more about democratisation or social movements than it has revolution.

With the progressive displacement of revolutionary study by other bodies of theory, the field has borne witness to an increasing number of scholars who theorise revolution without engaging in self-conscious

revolutionary theory. Perhaps reflective of the comparative primacy of these approaches over traditional revolutionary theory is Allinson's desire to count Della Porta's (2016) *Where Did the Revolution Go? Contentious Politics and the Quality of Democracy,* within the bounds of his proposed new generation. The book is instead a self-professed attempt to "read democratization through the lenses of social movement studies," (2016: 345). Despite the merits of Della Porta's book (and there are many: particularly her concept of 'eventful democratisation'), it is inaccurate to assess the book as a work of revolutionary theory. Indeed, Della Porta makes no claims to such an endeavour, and instead concludes the volume by specifying that her contribution was instead to identify "some mechanisms that convey the effects of social movements' participation in regime transition on some democratic qualities of the ensuing regime," (Della Porta, 2016: 345).

While questions about democratisation, social movements, and other facets of contentious politics assuredly remain important and relevant to the phenomenon of revolution, however broadly we cast our gaze around the periphery of revolutionary phenomena we must remember that the object of study around which revolutionary theory is situated is and remains revolution itself.

Whither the Fifth Generation?

Rather than dismissing a fifth generation out of hand, it is fairer to say that revolutionary theory's *fourth* generation is decidedly imperilled: perhaps by its desire to cover too many variables, perhaps by its turn away from bold theorising, perhaps by its partial displacement by other fields, and perhaps by the passage of time. Whether recent interventions will enable it to recover from this peril remains to be seen, but regardless of the success or failure of these efforts, the nascent seed of a fifth generation is already being sown. John Foran (2003), a one time champion of fourth-generation theory has called for the field of revolutionary theory to more usefully orient itself towards the revolutions of the future. Colin Beck (2018) has, through a series of incisive accounts and studies shown convincingly that present strategies of inquiry have stalled. As Allinson (2019) notes, we already have a suite of cases which disrupt established understandings, and as Lawson (2016) has convincingly argued, revolutionary theory is in dire need of theoretical reorientation.

Efforts to sustain fourth-generation theory would be much better spent cultivating the germinal ideas and discomforts of the fifth generation yet to come. This demands that we reward inventive scholarship, embrace novel projects and theories, and do away with ontological or methodological purism. But, what might a forthcoming fifth generation look like? Perhaps this is beyond the scope of any of us to predict at present, but I should like to at least provide a sketch of the direction in which things may be going.

I have a number of suspicions as to where the nascent fifth generation will take us, chiefly informed by my interactions with fellow colleagues, graduate students, and those who we might cautiously call 'practitioners'. In light of these exchanges, I am hopeful that we may well see a return to grander theorising than the kind seen in the fourth generation. In order to advance past our field's current impasse, we need a return to the kinds of ambitious comparisons, and innovative, in-depth theoretical accounts which have consistently characterised landmark work on revolution. Taken together, the past thirty years of scholarship have tended to show that concerns for multivariate breadth and processual partiality have been less conducive to scholarly progress than have past preferences for explanatory depth and empirical diversity.

As a relatively mature field, there is no reason that revolutionary theory cannot incorporate both kinds of analyses: in depth case studies and comparisons of differing cases to theorise the operation of important elements of revolution in a bold and compelling fashion, and larger scale meta-analyses to show how these elements interact with scientific precision. Not only is the opportunity ripe to give some order to the diffuse and partial analyses of the fourth generation, but also to revisit and update the contributions of the prior three in view of a more expansive object of study, and a more assertive theoretical bent. A crushing absence of difference-driven inquiry in past decades (Beck, 2018) has also left plenty of room for novel comparisons stretching across time, space, and culture, through which new insights might be achieved.

There are also arrays of unsolved problems and theoretical lacunae which are ripe for attack from a new generation of theorists. It is certainly true, for example, that the coming generation of revolutionary theorists will need to account for the counter-revolutionary and authoritarian outcomes which arose from the 2011 revolts (Allinson, 2019). As Foran (2003) has emphasised, both the ends and endings of

revolutions are areas much neglected by present-generation scholars. Revolutionary theorists have traditionally been very good at stating the relation between pre-revolutionary conditions and subsequent revolutionary challenges, and fourth-generation theorists have extended this analysis to the relation between revolutionary contexts and ongoing challenges elsewhere. However, very little has been done to clearly link the shape of revolutionary challenges with subsequent post-revolutionary outcomes (be they positive or negative), while retaining a perspective that looks beyond organised movements or static state boundaries.

This is not the only context in which revolutionary theory will need to look beyond revolutionary movements in its unit of analysis. Indeed, a fifth generation of revolutionary theory will need to look 'beyond the movement' in several other important ways if it is to capture the full variety of revolutionary phenomena. Not least, we will need to look beyond the organised networks of revolutionary elites and their followers, and again consider the role of the masses: not as a disordered mob, but as an array of complex individuals responding to intense socio-political phenomena and drawing on a rich palette of imaginaries (Selbin, 2019). As Beck (2011, 2015) has affirmed, we will also need to consider the role played by revolutions in transforming societies other than those in which they initially occur. And finally, I would contend that we will need to reassert the importance and veracity of decidedly *revolutionary* theorising, studying revolutions as socio-political events that are not always reducible to merely more extreme forms of social movements, processes of democratisation, or a subcategory of 'contentious politics'.

Finally, reflecting on the concerns of revolutionaries themselves, I sense that they hope— but do not expect— that the next generation of revolutionary theory will be more decidedly engaged with revolutionary practice. Since the end of the Jacobin-Bolshevik revolutionary epoch (1789-1989), scholars have become all the more content to regard revolutions with dispassionate interest, watching these bloody, brutal and dramatic social processes take place with a steely gaze before integrating them into their models or dataset for 'productive' analysis. But revolutions are not toys, and they are not scholarly miscellanea. They are the bloodied, broken corpus of the body politic in conflict with itself.

As such, we should aspire that future revolutionary theory might go some way toward ensuring that these processes result in collective emancipation, rather than merciless annihilation.

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[1] Perhaps there is some unintentional irony in identifying this latter ill: this is the sixth piece of fourth-generation auto-analysis (following Foran (1993), Goldstone (2001), Lawson (2016), Beck (2018), and Allinson (2019)).

[2] Taking into account the fate of more recent struggles and resistance movements, Ritter's reflections have proven prescient: perhaps the 'Iron Cage of Liberalism' has been replaced by a 'Bulletproof Vest of Illiberalism'.

[3] A notable exception to the abandonment of this trend is the work of Eric Selbin (2010), which has paid careful attention to the deep dynamics of culture, narrative, and agency in revolution.

[4] Take, for example, the recent Arab Spring, which, despite occurring in the neighbouring countries of Libya, Egypt, and Tunisia within a three-month period, still does not meet this criterion. Instead, we see three cases which, while possessing a suite of clear, identifiable similarities, are still so radically different as to problematise a 'most similar cases' approach to comparison.

[5] See: Goldstone and Ritter's (2018) overview.

[6] Charles Tilly, one of the leading figures in the project, was said to have joked that it was "the most successful failed experiment he had ever been involved in." (McAdam and Tarrow, 2011).