JPM718: Presentation Handout

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Reading’s Title: Hobson, John. 2000. The State and International Relations. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (pp. 174-191).

**1. Summary of the Reading**

*What is the reading about? What is the author’s main thesis and conclusions?*

In the reading there were presented two theories of the first wave of neo-Weberian historical sociology from Skocpol and Tilly, as an alternative to neorealism, whose approach is considered to be limited. The author argues, that both Skocpol and Tilly failed to go beyond neorealism, and unwittingly applied neorealist approach in their theories.

Theda Skocpol’s objective to bring the state back in as an agent of social change, which is understood through state autonomy and military exigencies of the international state system. State autonomy (domestic agential power) means that that state can act independently from its domestic classes and other constraints.
Only states with high domestic autonomy (adaptive states) can conform to anarchy and moreover are able to overcome domestic fetters, hence they rise in power.
States with low domestic autonomy are unable to overcome social fetters, in addition to defeat in war, they are also punished by social revolutions and ultimately are doomed to decline in power.
It can be concluded that state’s domestic autonomy enables or prevents a state from conforming to anarchy. According to Skocpol, social revolutions reproduce anarchy and serve to strengthen the state’s long-term military and political capacity which in the end enables state to conform to anarchy.

Charles Tilly introduced a theory of state formation in which two logics – capital and coercion variously interact to produce different paths of state formation. Assuming, that the main objective of the state is to conform to anarchy, Tilly defined three paths of state formation: the coercion-intensive, the capital intensive and the capitalized-coercive.
Coercive-intensive states suffer from a significant lack of either capital or commercialized production and trade. In these states, rulers pacify the dominant (aristocratic) class through violence. The domestic autonomy of the state is insufficient against the dominant class and as a result, dominant class pass on low tax revenues to the state, which makes state incapable to wage successful wars.
Capital intensive states have plenty capital and many merchants; hence rulers can easily collect tax revenues without coercion. However, no coercion under strong concentration of capital makes state institutions weak, hence state is becoming dependent on capitalists. Capital-intensive states last until the high war costs deplete them, moreover, they have low domestic autonomy against the domestic fetters.
Capitalized-coercive states, which accounts for states with balance between capital and coercion, have a central role in Tilly’s theory of state formation. These states are most efficient in international competition with other states and in adapting to anarchy. They have high domestic autonomy and concentration of capital, which makes them prepared for high costs of war and able to overcome domestic fetters.

Author, however, drawing from Skocpol and Tilly, underlines that their theories do not go beyond neorealism as they claim, but are neorealistic themselves, because eventually the anarchic structure determines what kind of state is likely to prosper, hence state is ultimately reduced to anarchy as Walz claims.

**2. Critical Analysis**

*What are the strong and weak points of the argument?*

Hobson made a strong argument about the theories introduced by Skocpol and Tilly, that were supposed to go beyond neorealism, however they failed in it. Based on their theories, what ultimately matters is the anarchical structure that determines the behavior of states. According to Hobson, Skocpol and Tilly has unwittingly applied neorealism to theorize state autonomy and explain socio-economic and political change.

He further argues that revolutionary class are unwitting agents of political elites, therefore their influence is not decisive. I will argue that this argument is rather weak because he did not provide any evidence for his claim that it must be in any case.

According to Hobson, Skocpol’s theory is a complement to Waltz’s claim that adaptive state behavior serves to reproduce the anarchic system and a state’s capacity to govern is set by its ability to conform to anarchy.

Hobson says that Tilly also failed with his theory by using neorealist logic to explain state formation when only those states that can adapt to anarchy and international military competition will survive. The idea of emulating the successful practices of the leading states is also almost identical to neorealist George Modelski. Moreover, Tilly also adds, that the most important ability for state is to centralize its power and enhance tax revenues, which can be seen as neorealist approach similar to Gilpin. These Hobson’s arguments are strong because the connection between neorealist approach and the theories presented by Skocpol and Tilly is quite evident.

**3. Relation to the Main Reading**

*How does the argument relate to, and/or expand the argument of the main reading to which it is linked in the syllabus?*

The main link between the readings is, that both stress the significance of the capital and social classes for state, especially in terms of warfare. To make war more effective, states must locate as much capital as possible.

Furthermore, war making can be seen as the main stimulus to increase taxes or debt, hence it is crucial for the state to have the dominant classes in his favor to prevent potential revolution. Those classes might also provide a financial aid or technical services to ensure the obedience of the rest of the population.

The reading from Hobson complements the main reading with the concept of anarchy, in which if a state wants to adapt to it, it must have domestic agential power or autonomy from its domestic social classes. Moreover, there is a strong need for balance between coercion and capital, because too much violence leads to insufficient tax revenues from the dominant classes and on the other hand, abundance of capital weakens state‘s institutions.

Hobbes also stresses that this approach is sheer neorealism because the anarchy is the ultimate element that compels states to act accordingly.