de Leon, Cedric. 2016. Discussant. Invited Session on the 50th Anniversary of Barrington Moore's *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (with papers by Elisabeth Clemens, Dylan Riley, and Theda Skocpol), American Sociological Association Annual Meeting, Aug. 21, Seattle

In an essay written in 1996, thirty years after the publication of *Social Origins*, Barrington Moore, Jr. identified three “Bequests of the Twentieth Century to the Twenty-First,” namely, mounting poverty, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and the rise of fundamentalisms around the world. The programmatic aspect of the piece is interesting enough, and we will return to it later, but the genealogical accent is a more useful point of entry.

The essay was written in memory of Yale sociologist and sometime southern apologist William Graham Sumner, whom Moore calls his “intellectual grandfather...in the somewhat personal sense that I was a graduate student of Sumner’s junior colleague and collaborator, Albert Galloway Keller.” Among Sumner’s essays is one titled, “The Bequests of the Nineteenth Century to the Twentieth,” which stresses the sources of severe conflict from one epoch to another. Moore reveals his admiration for the “no nonsense” tone in Sumner’s work, which he says, was “completely free of the high-minded and edifying themes” of “democracy and brotherly love” that “audiences still expect on ritual occasions” (Moore 1998: 168).

Though one would be hard-pressed to find a single sociologist today who would publicly claim Sumner as their intellectual grandfather, it is a testament to Moore that we all claim him.

Claiming Moore is tricky, however. On the one hand, because of his status as the pre-eminent theorist of fascism, communism and democratization, comparative historical sociologists are called upon to be *of* the world. It is this paradoxically presentist orientation that is behind

Clemens' restatement of Moore's overarching question, namely, "What are the conditions and processes that produce a better life for many, perhaps most, people?" On the other hand, because of his enormous influence his intellectual descendants are continually dragged back to the past in a way that I suspect Moore would heartily disapprove of. As Theda Skocpol and others have observed, Moore avoided cultivating a school of his own, yet we are expected to reckon with his approach not only as a perennial alternative hypothesis in our literature reviews but consequently as a rite of professional passage (Ross et al 1998: 2; Skocpol et al 2011).

In this paper, I address two questions: What *have* we done in celebration of Moore and what *can* be done when this celebration is over. What we *have* done amidst the competing pressures of the present and the profession is to individuate as the young do in relation to their elders. That is, we find our voice – our professional selfhood – by disagreeing with Moore, and in case anyone thinks I am looking down my nose at others, let me just remind you that the first article I ever published was titled, "No Bourgeois Mass Party, No Democracy: The Missing Link in Barrington Moore's American Civil War."

On the question of individuation, our illustrious panelists are no exception, though each has traveled a distinct and perhaps ideal-typical path. Dylan Riley is the comparative historical sociologist who forcefully rejects his elder only to appreciate him with time. In his 2010 book, *Civic Foundations of Fascism in Europe*, Riley undercuts the structuralist version of Moore's thesis, which suggests that a dominant landed elite, reliant upon state support for labor-repressive agriculture, combines with a junior partner in the bourgeoisie, to defeat insurgencies of workers and peasants. He finds little support for the Moore thesis. In Italy fascism was most popular in

the North, not in the labor-repressive agrarian South. In Spain, large landowners were political decisive, but they never formed an effective alliance with industrialists. In Romania, a politically dominant landed elite was dramatically weakened by land reform before fascism took hold. In sum, Riley argues, “The central empirical problem that Italy, Spain, and Romania pose to [Moore’s] argument is the weakness or absence of an alliance of state-dependent industrialists and labor-repressive agrarians” (Riley 2010: 150-151, 157-159, 162, 168-169).

Over time, Dylan has come to appreciate a latent evenemential sociology in *Social Origins*. In a brilliant reinterpretation of that work, he turns established wisdom on its head by arguing that Moore sees fascism as the modal tendency of the modern world and that only events such as the American Civil War and the French Revolution are able to knock societies off the path of least resistance.

Barrington Moore’s junior colleague and his most direct descendant on this panel, Theda Skocpol became what Moore would have been had he been a touch more extroverted. Their common touchstone appears to have been what C. Wright Mills called the modern revival of the classical tradition: critical and historically oriented studies of pressing relevance to the human condition. This was public sociology *before* public sociology. But as Skocpol herself points out in two retrospective pieces, Moore was a traditional scholar, who valued above all the quiet isolation of his study, the companionship of his beloved wife Betty, and the occasional get-together with his students. He rarely went to professional meetings and rejected the tenure track to be a senior lecturer in the social studies program at Harvard (Ross et al 1998: 2-5; Skocpol et al 2011).

Theda Skocpol burst upon the scene with her now classic *States and Social Revolutions* (1979). If Moore's vision of large-scale social transformations was anchored in "combinatorial and contingent" class alliances, then as Elisabeth Clemens (2016) writes of her advisor's work, Skocpol retained Moore's focus on social classes but with two key differences: she highlights the pressures created by expanding circuits of international trade and the relationship between state actors and landed elites (Clemens 2016: 36). Since then, Theda Skocpol has become no less accomplished than Moore and has probably surpassed him in sheer scholarly productivity, but she is a much less reluctant public intellectual. She is the Director of the Scholars Strategy Network, which is a clearing house through which researchers engage in public debate and influence policy. Her most recent book is on the Tea Party's impact on the conservative movement in America. More recently, she has engaged in a full frontal assault on the current Republican presidential nominee that is as deadly as a Joe Biden stemwinder. In an op-ed published two weeks ago, she wrote,

From the lips of an authoritarian, blustery contender for the highest executive office in the land come a steady stream of threats, insults and big lies. At huge rallies, he eggs on violence and stokes popular hatred and divisions... He promises to lock up, deport and exclude from the country entire demonized categories of people, while rolling back the rights of minorities, gays and workers. He boasts about ignorance of world affairs, calls on foreign powers to help him defeat domestic competitors and pushes to overturn his country's longstanding international agreements and alliances. What country are we talking about? Kim Jong-un's North Korea? Idi Amin's Uganda? Chavez's Venezuela?

Mussolini's Italy? No, amazingly enough, it is the United States of America in 2016, where Donald Trump, a radical ethno-nationalist, has taken the helm of the once venerable Republican Party.” (Skocpol 2016)

Elisabeth Clemens is the grandstudent who returns via a circuitous route of accolades and glamorous leadership posts to be the curator of Moore's legacy. By legacy I mean comparative historical sociology in its third wave and by curator I do not mean dusting Moore's framed portrait at Harvard, but rather urging us to renew the subfield.

Clemens made her bones with the 1997 breakout book, *The People's Lobby*. In that work, the combinatorial formula of Moore and later Skocpol changes character once again as she explains that a social movement's interpenetration with the party machine stunts organizational innovation, whereas relative isolation from the party system encourages it. The paradoxical result is that though feminists were disfranchised, the absence of partisan meddling enabled them to inaugurate modern interest group politics as we know it, whereas organized labor, which had been thoroughly coopted and infiltrated by the party system languished, as indeed it does today relative to other disfranchised groups such as undocumented immigrants.

The palpable shift away from her forebears' intellectual preoccupations suggests that Clemens is not one who buys into the “great questions” approach to comparative historical sociology that center principally on revolution, democratization, the state and capitalism. Indeed, in the introduction to her co-edited volume, *Remaking Modernity*, with Julia Adams and Ann Orloff, she writes quite categorically, “historical sociology will *die* if left solely to modify the second

wave's answers to Marxist questions generated in the heat of the 1960s" (Adams, Clemens, and Orloff 2005: 63). This, they point out, would be a "death by involution." Moreover, though a pluralist historical sociologies approach is preferable to the "great questions," they likewise predict death amidst the thousand flowers that bloom. "Surrendering to centripetal forces," they write, "*kills* conversations about large-scale social change and relations across social domains" (Adams, Clemens, and Orloff 2005: 64). If I may rephrase, comparative historical sociology doesn't have to be about the same thing, but it must be about some thing.

If Moore's aforementioned essay on the "Bequests of the Twentieth Century to the Twenty-First" is any indication, then I think it is safe to say that Moore is with Clemens on this one. Moore goes out of his way to announce the death of the great questions. In this ten-page essay, he spends four pages telling us to let go of the social conflicts that have given the twentieth century its distinctive character but are unlikely to be important in the twenty-first. Some of you may be surprised to hear that one social conflict that must go by the analytical wayside is "revolution on the scale of the Russian and Chinese Revolution" (Moore 1998: 169). In its stead Moore proposes a research agenda focused on three causes of human misery. Here at last we find an answer to the question, "WWBMJD": What would Barrington Moore, Jr. do? The first is "massive grinding and degrading poverty," with special emphasis on the "political unwillingness to tap abundant resources, especially those controlled by the military" for "fear of upsetting the prevailing system of privilege and inequality." The second is "the plague of AIDS." In the event of a cure, he writes, "the task of getting any remedy, or set of remedies to the people who need them would be daunting at the very least. In the absence of a remedy, there are responsible epidemiologists who estimate that in the near future, death from AIDS will make the Black

Death seem a puny affair” (Moore 1998: 172). The third reveals his alignment with Skocpol and Riley, for here he urges us to turn our attention to fundamentalism – not Muslim fundamentalism, but to movements in general that “display an antirational and anti-intellectual current...are hostile to foreigners and display a notable inclination toward violence” (Moore 1998: 174). Moore does not offer any diagnosis this time, but he does pose a new puzzle that is similar but notably more optimistic than the one that Lis argues underpins his earlier work: “Human beings find it extraordinarily difficult to work together peacefully for shared and humane purposes. Yet somehow they manage now and then to do so, if often under duress and despite their inclinations.”

Let me be so bold as to suggest that we have done enough individuation. The best among us [pointing to the panel] have already done what there is to do in that quarter. I daresay Moore would be impatient with our perseveration over him today. He resisted the grand theorizing and abstract empiricism that was fashionable in his own time; he repurposed, mixed and matched the classics; he sidestepped the past literature. Above all, he was keenly aware of the political and moral stakes involved in our enterprise. From now on, let us wear Barrington Moore lightly, and strike out with critical questions that are the bequest not of Moore himself, but of the demands that the world places upon us.

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