

## 7 The Politics of Inequality

In the presence of an effective government, politics as usual involves both exploitation and opportunity hoarding. Since generations of anarchists and libertarians have railed against it, the exploitative side of government comes easily into view. Ruling classes use government-controlled means and resources to extract surplus value from the efforts of categorically excluded subject populations, redirecting at least some of the surplus to activities from which the subject population does not benefit, although the ruling classes do. Taxes and conscription represent two obvious forms of extraction, colonial wars and promotion of ruling-class businesses two obvious forms of diverted resources. The big question is not whether exploitation happens, but who belongs to the ruling classes and how they dispose of surplus value: on their own private enterprises, on their own creature comforts, on war, on public goods.

In general, democrats prefer democracy because large parts of the citizenry join the ruling classes and because, consequently, decision

makers are inclined to invest extracted surplus in public goods. On the whole, democracies enforce distinctions between inclusion and exclusion with as much energy as autocracies; recent moves by Western democracies to exclude noncitizens from public benefits illustrate just such exclusiveness. As compared with tyrannies and oligarchies, nevertheless, democracies include far more of their populations in the ruling classes and provide more regular channels for movement from exclusion to inclusion.

Categorically organized opportunity hoarding likewise occurs widely in politics, but less visibly than exploitation. Consider only two examples: state enforcement of class-specific property rights and creation of regional autonomies on the basis of ethnic distinctness. In the first case, most historical states have given preference to the property rights of landlords over those of peasants, herders, hunters, and gatherers who live from the same land. In the second, systems of indirect rule such as the Ottoman empire and Stalin's nationalities policy generally give priority and state backing to one declared ethnicity within each subunit. Under these circumstances, to be sure, at a regional scale opportunity hoarding edges easily over into exploitation.

Some exploitative states, indeed, have made a business of promoting opportunity hoarding for a consideration. The seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French state pushed to an extreme the sale of privileges: revenue-generating public offices, craft monopolies, powers to control (and therefore to draw income from) musical performances, municipal charters, mining rights, and much more. (See Henshall 1992; Kettering 1993; for the promotion of opportunity hoarding in other European states, see, e.g., Adams 1994; Samuel Clark 1995; Gustafsson 1994a, 1994b.) Holding a state-sold public office, for example, commonly entitled the officeholder not only to collect a stipend from some stream of state revenues but also to charge large fees for state-mandated services, not to mention under-the-table *pots de vin*—gifts, tips, commissions, or bribes, depending on your perspective. In these cases, the state treasury typically collected a cash payment from the beneficiary as the privilege began and loaned state power when necessary to exclude unauthorized persons from competitive activities.

Under Louis XIV, the great regional administrators, the Intendants, put significant shares of their effort into enticing, persuading, or coercing rich men to buy such privileges. They also frequently forced less rich members of guilds and municipal governments to make collective payments for maintenance of their exclusive rights to govern, to gather customary fees, or to exercise their trades. Coerced or not, privilege-holders drew benefits from their state-backed exclusive access to circumscribed sets of opportunities. In the process, state authorities reinforced or created categorical inequality, most visibly by attaching noble status to a wide range of purchased offices.

Even where they do not draw major revenues from the activity, all contemporary states engage in some promotion of opportunity hoarding. Licensing of professions always entails state-backed exclusion of uncertified persons from the practice of those professions, while selective recruitment of military veterans into certain occupational niches has a similar effect. In the name of public health, public safety, promotion of enterprise, and protection of property, states repeatedly help favored networks to establish exclusive control over valued resources.

Emulation and adaptation, in their turn, usually sustain government-supported categorical inequality. Governments imitate other governments' forms, including their forms of inequality. Citizens then adapt, fashioning routines that facilitate their own individual and collective projects. Since they set up routines that secure their survival, however contingently, many citizens then start to condemn other citizens who escape common obligations, even obligations to a recognizably exploitative state. Only under great pressures such as those endured by the South African state during the 1980s do those supports for the routine politics of inequality begin to tremble.

Inequality's politics, then, simply constitutes a special case of inequality's general operation. The special case consists of those situations in which one of the parties is a government—that is, an organization controlling the principal concentrated means of coercion within some substantial territory. (As the earlier discussion of nationalism suggests, a government is a state if it does not clearly fall under the jurisdiction of another government and if it receives recognition from other relatively

autonomous governments.) The politics of inequality concerns the involvement of governments in inequality-generating social processes. But it also concerns the impact of inequality on governmental processes and struggles for power over governments. That includes situations in which contenders explicitly struggle over issues of inequality.

Four distinguishable questions therefore confront us:

- When one of the parties is a government, how do exploitation, opportunity hoarding, emulation, and adaptation operate in the creation, installation, maintenance, transformation, and destruction of paired and unequal categories?
- How do the character and extent of categorical inequality in an organization or population affect its basic political processes?
- Under what conditions, how, and with what possible consequences does inequality itself become an object of political struggle?
- Under what conditions do political struggle and/or governmental action produce significant changes in prevailing patterns of inequality?

I make no pretense of providing comprehensive answers to such large questions here. I hope only to show that the framework slowly constructed in previous chapters offers fresh perspectives on each of them.

Inequality-generating processes operate similarly whether or not one of the parties is a government. Critical differences spring chiefly from two defining features of governments: their *organizational priority* within a defined territory, and their control of concentrated *coercive means*. Organizational priority helps to explain why governmental agents frequently intervene, or at least hover, as third parties in nonstate relations of exploitation or opportunity hoarding. Control of coercive means helps to explain why the intervention of governmental agents often makes a large difference to inequality and why people so regularly struggle over state control of major resources. Governmental actions guarantee or threaten a wide range of rights, including categorically differentiated property rights.

Since their emergence as distinct forms of social organization some

ten thousand years ago, states have always intervened in patterns of inequality across the territories their rulers have controlled. Most of the time, their agents have tried to maintain and reproduce existing inequalities, notably those guaranteeing the dominance of their ruling classes and sustaining supplies of essential state resources: money, weapons, soldiers, food, transport, communications. Tax and tribute policies, military conscription and requisitioning, and defense of the state's central resource base—trade, for city-states and city-empires; agricultural property, for agrarian empires; flocks and grazing land, for states based on pastoral economies; manufacturing and transport facilities, for states of industrial capitalism—have generally assumed and reinforced existing relations of inequality. In their armies, hospitals, and bureaucracies, states have provided models for exploitation and opportunity hoarding in nongovernmental organizations.

As they enact laws, states commonly create paired categories or put their weight behind existing categorical pairs. Marriage licenses underscore the line between married and unmarried; birth certificates, the division between legitimate and illegitimate; government-issued identity cards, the separation between citizens and noncitizens; military discharge papers, the border between veterans and nonveterans. On either side of such a categorical partition, rights and duties differ significantly. In most cases, the incorporation of categorical distinctions into law reinforces existing structures of power and inequality.

Although states have often provided meager aid to their "deserving" poor, have frequently attacked regional populations that resisted central rule, have occasionally dispossessed churches and other wealthy institutions in times of crisis, and have sometimes inadvertently undermined their own supporters through military and fiscal policies, only under mass democracy, with its pitting of numbers against other resources, have many states deliberately sought to redistribute income, wealth, or goods in ways that might alter existing relations of inequality. States, then, significantly affect durable inequality, chiefly by reproducing its existing forms.

States also serve as sites and instruments of exploitation and opportunity hoarding. Every government sustains a *polity*, a set of relations

among actors who have routine, low-cost access to governmental agents. Collectively, if unequally, polity members exercise control over the government's resources. A thin version of polity membership consists of citizenship: a publicly established set of mutual rights and obligations linking the entire category of native-born and naturalized persons to government agents. Observers customarily think of citizenship as the affair of states, but exactly parallel phenomena of inclusion and obligation appeared in European municipalities and other local units long before any substantial national citizenships formed (Cerutti, Desimon, and Prak 1995; Gustafsson 1994a, 1994b). Even today all but the most centralized states tolerate (or even insist on) some forms of citizenship below the national level. Almost all citizens of federal states such as Switzerland, the United States, and Germany, for example, also belong to at least one of their country's component units.

In addition to broad rights of protection from agents of outside states, citizenship frequently entails obligations such as military service and rights such as health benefits. Citizenship commonly occurs in multiple degrees—all states having elections, for example, exclude small children and some certified incompetents from voting. In forty-six states of the contemporary United States, a felony conviction disfranchises the convict for his or her prison term, and in thirty-one states disfranchisement extends to the period of parole or probation; because black men receive felony convictions at much higher rates than the rest of the American population, a full 14 percent of them currently lack the right to vote (Butterfield 1997, 12). The larger categorical system to which citizenship belongs typically includes further distinctions such as native-born citizen/naturalized citizen/legal resident/illegal resident/legal visitor/excluded foreigner. Such systems always include formal procedures to transfer persons from one category to another.

Thicker versions of polity membership crosscut categories of citizenship; they create standing for collective actors either in the form of licensed organizations (the American Medical Association, the AFL-CIO) or institutionalized categories (the medical profession, organized labor). Much political struggle centers on establishing, challenging, maintaining, or exercising the claims of such categorically defined collective actors. When those struggles gain ground, indeed, we frequently

witness corresponding alterations in the state's own structure, as when cabinet-level departments of labor, women's affairs, environmental problems, or health form to deal with the claims raised by their counterparts among the polity members.

Since every inclusion entails some exclusion, these processes incorporate categorical inequality into public affairs. Where polity members succeed in directing state-controlled resources to their own exclusive activities and in using government power to commit other people's effort to the extraction of return from those resources, state-backed exploitation and opportunity hoarding occur. Veterans get pensions that non-veterans pay for, well-organized ranchers get cheap access to public lands, recognized Indian tribes get rights to operate tax-exempt casinos. Once such government-validated scripts come into play, however, the advantages they confer typically stir widespread emulation, for example, in the demands of previously unorganized Indian tribes to be recognized as full-fledged Native American entities, entitled to the same fiscal exemptions as their established cousins.

In the United States, exclusion has operated especially along racial lines, excluding Americans who have known African forebears from full citizenship through much of the country's history, excluding Chinese in the nineteenth century, actually interning Japanese Americans during World War II. Black exclusion has varied dramatically by region within the United States, with states of the old Cotton South more often using legal means to exclude black people from voting, public facilities, benefits, and employment. For Louisiana, Virginia Domínguez documents how the term "Creole" long referred to all the native-born population regardless of genetic or national ancestry. In the black/white politicization of Reconstruction, however, the term became an instrument by which whites of French or Spanish background not only claimed domination over anyone with detectable African ancestry but also excluded from rule other whites who lacked their colonial ancestry (Domínguez 1986). A contradictory situation emerged:

Two types of Louisianians consequently identify themselves today as Creole. One is socially and legally white; the other, socially and legally colored. The white side by definition cannot accept the existence of colored Creoles; the colored side, by definition, cannot accept the white

conception of *Creole*. The problem is encapsulated in the use of the terms *Cajun Creole* and *Creole Cajun*. These expressions make no sense at all to white Creoles. A Creole in their estimation is a purely white descendant of French or Spanish settlers in colonial Louisiana; a Cajun is a purely white descendant of Acadian colonial settlers in southern Louisiana. (Domínguez 1986, 149)

Although the term has changed meaning several times, although genetically the Louisiana population is amply mixed, and although socially defined people of color have their own version of the categories involved, in the twentieth century the “white” version of Creole/other became a basis of claims for political control. Within the socially defined nonwhite population, the term also became politicized, first serving to distinguish the elite (especially the light-skinned elite) of mixed African and European descent from the rest and then becoming controversial and losing favor as civil rights activists led the move toward defining everyone having some known African ancestry as black.

By the 1930s, most of the American South had installed systems of racial domination based on the white/black line. Theda Skocpol points out a paradoxical result of New Deal legislation, which allocated great discretionary power to the states:

Southern authorities feared that even small public assistance grants to nonworkers would cause entire black families to stay out of the cotton fields. They prevented this by excluding blacks altogether or by suspending assistance payments during harvest. Even when grants were given, moreover, “although discrimination was illegal, southern states were allowed to pay blacks lower grants than whites by using different criteria for determining need, and by paying Confederate veterans and their dependents the maximum grant.” In broad historical perspective, it is amazing that southern states were able to use federal subsidies after 1934 to enrich assistance to Confederate veterans and survivors, the very persons who had been excluded altogether from the federal Civil War pensions of the nineteenth century! (Skocpol 1995, 143)

Even in the face of formal federal prohibitions, individual states and local administrators managed to build categorical racial inequality into the very rights of citizens.



Similar processes operate at an international scale. We have already examined the creation of new states in response to state-seeking nationalism as a categorical process. International institutions, interstate compacts, and transnational organizations likewise involve themselves in support of categorical distinctions within existing states. The category of refugee, for example, relates a set of residents juridically, economically, and socially to inhabitants of at least two territories: the one they have fled and the one in which they currently live. Liisa Malkki has worked with Hutu refugees from Burundi, a group whose core fled to Tanzania in response to 1972 mass killings by the Tutsi-dominated Burundian army. The majority who settled in internationally certified refugee camps (such as Mishamo, where Malkki concentrated her effort) differed little at the start from the smaller number who found toeholds in and around Kigoma township. By the mid-1980s, however, the two populations occupied very different positions:

The most relevant contrast in the present context is that the social status of being a refugee had a very pronounced salience in the camp refugees' life-worlds, while in town it generally did not. In Mishamo it was indispensable to understand something of the social and political meaning given collectively to refugeeness and to exile by the camp inhabitants. In contrast, for the people I have called the town refugees, refugee status was generally not a collectively heroized or positively valued aspect of one's social person. Insofar as it was considered relevant at all, it was more often a liability than a protective or positive status. (Malkki 1996, 379–380)

Like small-scale nationalists and internationally designated indigenous peoples, camp refugees have constructed for themselves a standard history of their population that represents them as the rightful natives of Burundi, deprived of their rights by Belgian incompetence and Tutsi trickery. Categorical membership gives camp refugees distinctive relations to Burundian citizens, Tanzanian citizens, and international authorities. United Nations agencies and international nongovernmental organizations do not necessarily subscribe to the refugees' own cherished histories, but these histories do reinforce Hutu claims to protection, temporary use of Tanzanian land, and political distinctness. In an

unexpected location, we find a conjunction of opportunity hoarding and categorical inequality.

Within states, inclusion processes parallel the awarding of independent states to representatives of ostensible nations (and therefore the exclusion of rival claimants to representation of the same or crosscutting nations) on an international scale. We saw just such state-backed production of categorical inequality in South Africa. But it occurs, generally with less severity, in all states. States formally certify labor unions, professional organizations, firms, and political parties, thus confirming their priority within their designated spheres over rivals and enemies. Less formally, states also offer selective recognition to ethnic leaders, spokespersons for different segments of capital, representatives of organized women, and other blocs—in each case excluding others categorically from that piece of power. Included parties share in exploitation based on state-controlled resources or hoard opportunities based on resources sequestered with government support.

In principle, we might distinguish between, on the one hand, direct incorporation of unequal categories into state structure and, on the other, state intervention to enforce or alter categorically unequal practices in organizations or arenas falling under the state's jurisdiction. In either regard, state action often has strong impact on durable inequality. South African racial legislation directly inscribed racial distinctions into citizenship, and Jim Crow legislation in the United States of the late nineteenth century employed a series of devices using invisible ink to inscribe race into law often without naming the races in print, while Western states long explicitly barred all females from suffrage when large shares of adult males could vote. All these arrangements constituted direct incorporation of legal categories into state structure.

Desegregation of public accommodations; requirements of affirmative action based on race, gender, or ethnicity in private employment; and compensatory aid to minority businesses all belong to the second set of instances, where state intervention significantly affects inequality in loci outside its own structure. State-driven integration of government-run schools, elimination of inequality in recruitment to the armed forces, and legally initiated alteration of electoral districts or access to

public employment straddle both cases since they involve state intervention in organizations and arenas the state itself operates. The line between direct incorporation and state intervention therefore becomes a continuum.

Because in all sorts of states members of dominant categories ordinarily mobilize more effectively and enjoy more direct access to agents or instruments of state power than do members of subordinate categories, states usually act to reinforce—or at least to sustain—existing categorical inequalities. Through standard adaptation processes and opportunity hoarding, even members of exploited categories acquire interests in the maintenance of categorical distinctions, if not in the degree or character of inequality across categorical boundaries. Democratic arrangements attenuate such effects by pitting the normally greater numbers of the less privileged against the superior resources of the elite; hence, with favorable alliances, they often produce modest redistribution of resources toward less favored citizens. But except under the influence of state-threatening social movements, revolutionary situations, extensive military mobilizations, major defeats in war, and intense fiscal crises, we have precious few historical instances of state-led attacks on unequal categories themselves.

That the category-sustaining work of states is often inadvertent does not reduce its effect. Observers of welfare states (e.g., Haavio-Mannila 1993; Orloff 1996b; Sim 1994) have shown how national redistribution policies tend to assume and reproduce existing forms of gender inequality; on the whole, for example, public welfare policies assume that men will be disproportionately involved in paid work away from home (including military service) and that women will devote themselves to unpaid care of others, especially children. Since most states attach significant rewards to military service and paid work, such an assumption channels state resources to men and affords women access to those resources chiefly through marriage to a wage earner or independent involvement in wage earning. Thus unmarried women who are unemployed or self-employed and their children almost always lose out in redistribution, protection, and access to public services.

The same inquiries, however, have also demonstrated substantial

differences among welfare regimes. To take the extreme case, Scandinavian countries (where high proportions of women work for wages and labor movements have been more successful in maintaining pressure for extensive state-sponsored benefits) generally grant women more independent rights than most other capitalist regimes. Feminist analyses of differences between Scandinavia and other Western regions therefore assign major importance to national-level political processes in the generation of state-based inequality. By so doing, they implicitly raise doubts that patriarchy, male chauvinism, or other unchanging cultural characteristics drive the politics of gender inequality.

#### CATHOLIC EMANCIPATION IN GREAT BRITAIN

What of religion? As the history of nationalism indicates, ties between religious identity and political privilege have fluctuated enormously over the long run of European history. During the last millennium, Europe has witnessed everything from the Ottoman empire's ready (if unequal) absorption of Christians and Jews to the Nazis' programmed annihilation of those Jews they could track down. Broadly speaking, political exclusion on the basis of religious identity increased with the violently vindictive pursuit of Muslims, Jews, and Christian heretics during the fifteenth century; reached a state of war through much of Central and Western Europe during the sixteenth century; stabilized in the same regions from 1648 to 1789 with the Westphalian doctrine of *cujus regio ejus religio*; and then receded irregularly through much of the continent from the French Revolution onward.

Twentieth-century nationalism, for the most part, stresses nonreligious markers such as language and descent. To be sure, religious prejudice and unofficial discrimination survived the French Revolution, sometimes even flourishing as in nineteenth-century pogroms and the Dreyfus case. Nazi policy specifically targeted Jews for their religious difference. Nevertheless, by the twentieth century, categorical religious exclusion from political rights became rare. Even anti-Semitism took on more racist than religious content, with current beliefs and affiliations

matter much less than imputed descent (Birnbaum 1993). Until recently, at least this was true; whether the sharpening of state-identified religious divisions in the former Soviet Union, in disintegrated Yugoslavia, and potentially in France constitutes a reversal or a momentary aberration remains to be seen.

Insertion of religious, ethnic, or racial boundaries into state organization renders readily visible the parallels between manifestly political forms of action and routine smaller-scale operations of categorical inequality. South Africa under apartheid represents an extreme case of a general phenomenon. All governments survive and thrive to the extent that they successfully establish exploitation, opportunity hoarding, emulation, and adaptation. Governments differ chiefly in who benefits from these inequality-producing processes.

The politics of inclusion and exclusion on the basis of religious affiliation provides a serious challenge to organizational explanations of inequality. Here, if anywhere, we might expect deeply ingrained individual and collective attitudes to override (or explain) the installation of categorical inequality. The case of Catholic exclusion and inclusion in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Great Britain, however, shows us exploitation, opportunity hoarding, emulation, and adaptation all recognizably at work. The story of British struggles over Catholic rights joins our earlier stories of nationalism and of South African racial divisions. We recognize them all as coming from the book of durable categorical inequality. In all of them, the construction and imposition of categories served the exploitative interests of rulers and political entrepreneurs. But in the saga of Catholic Emancipation, we see the British ruling-class interest in political control countered by increasingly salient interests in military resources and the maintenance of order.

How so? The tale of Catholic Emancipation unfolds between the Glorious Revolution of 1688–1689 and the relaxation of religious restrictions on citizenship in 1828–1829. In that tale we see Britain's ruling classes operating a system of exploitation in which state power draws effort from the Catholic (and especially Irish Catholic) masses while barring them from returns of that effort. Anglican elites hoard opportunities afforded them by the political system, and emulation builds the

distinctions Anglican-Catholic-Dissenters into a wide range of social settings, while adaptation both creates partial exemptions for elite Dissenters and organizes an uneasy but effective *modus vivendi* among members of diverse religious categories.

In Great Britain, the political program that eventually won the name "Catholic Emancipation" originated in wars, both civil and international. Struggles of 1688–1689 toppled Roman Catholic James II from the British throne, established Protestant William of Orange as king, and restored a Protestant ruling class in colonized, largely Catholic, Ireland. The Glorious Revolution of 1689 barred Catholics from public office, capping their exclusion with an officeholder's oath that denied tenets of the Catholic religion and (in the case of members of Parliament) explicitly rejected the pope's authority. Britain's and Ireland's Catholics fell under the double suspicion of subservience to a foreign authority, the pope, and of collaboration with Britain's historic enemy, France. The British state, in essence, matched the interior category of officeholding citizen to the exterior category of Anglican.

Although non-Anglican Protestants also suffered political disabilities under the settlement of 1689, in practice subsequent regimes shut Catholics out of Parliament and public life much more effectively. Anglicans, and to a lesser extent other Protestants, hoarded officeholding opportunities, while the British gained the benefits of Irish Catholic efforts without sharing these benefits. Once again, exploitation and opportunity hoarding coincide. Over the longer run, however, the costs of exclusion came to exceed its benefits to British rulers. Collective action by Catholics themselves played a significant part in that shifting balance. How that happened is the story of Catholic Emancipation.

Oaths of abjuration individualized membership in the Catholic category and made it seem centrally a matter of belief. Certainly Catholicism had implications for individual characteristics and behavior in the United Kingdom, as it did elsewhere. But to be Catholic in the sense that influenced British citizenship between 1689 and 1829 consisted of involvement in crucial social ties: relations to priests and the church hierarchy, relations to a publicly identified community of Catholic believers, and most of all, relations—largely negative—to an Anglican establishment.

Just as categorizing someone as a worker conveniently signals a bundle of personal characteristics but finally depends on distinction from and relation to the employer category, categorizing someone as a Catholic finally designates a boundary and a distinctive set of social ties across that boundary. Distinctions between Catholic and non-Catholic obviously existed before 1689 and after 1829; between the two dates, however, they coincided with relations between fuller and lesser citizens. As time went on, that coincidence came under increasing challenge.

Catholic exclusion had serious political consequences. When Britain won Québec from France in the Seven Years War (1756–1763), the British empire not only gained jurisdiction over an almost unanimously Catholic population but also pacified resistance to British control by large concessions to Québécois, hence to Catholic, self-rule. That settlement inserted a twin to Ireland into the British realm but granted its Catholics more favorable conditions than their Irish coreligionists enjoyed. To the extent that the British incorporated Catholic Ireland into their economy and polity, furthermore, the Irish Protestant establishment became a less effective instrument of indirect rule, and the demands of Catholic Irish on both sides of the Irish Sea for either autonomy or representation swelled. Enlargement of the armed forces during the American war, finally, rendered military recruiters increasingly eager to enroll Irish warriors, already reputed as mercenaries elsewhere in Europe but barred from British military service by the required anti-Catholic oath.

Military-inspired exemptions of Catholic soldiers from oath-taking during the later 1770s raised strident objections among defenders of Anglican supremacy. Such exemptions directly incited the formation of a nationwide Protestant Association to petition, agitate, and resist. Scottish member of Parliament Lord George Gordon, whose vociferous opposition to Catholic claims brought him to the head of the association in 1780, led an anti-Catholic campaign that at first concentrated on meetings and parliamentary petitions but during June 1780 ramified into attacks on Catholic persons and (especially) property in London. Two hundred seventy-five people died during those bloody struggles, chiefly at the hands of troops who were retaking control over London's streets. Among Britain's ruling classes, those so-called Gordon Riots gave popular anti-Catholicism an aura of violent unreason. By negotiation,

advocacy of Catholics' political rights acquired the cachet of enlightenment.

From that time onward an important fusion occurred. Catholic Emancipation became a standard (although by no means universal) demand of reformers and radicals who campaigned for parliamentary reform. By "reform," its advocates generally meant something like elimination of parliamentary seats controlled by patrons, more uniform qualifications for voting across the country, enlargement of the electorate, and frequent parliamentary elections. (Demands for universal suffrage, for manhood suffrage, or even for equal individual-by-individual representation among the propertied rarely gained much of a following before well into the nineteenth century.) Catholic Emancipation dovetailed neatly with such proposals, since it likewise called for granting a more equal and effective voice in public affairs to currently excluded people.

Both parliamentary reform and Catholic Emancipation surged, and then collapsed, as national political issues in Great Britain several times between the 1780s and the 1820s. But Emancipation became more urgent during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, when William Pitt the Younger sought to still the Irish revolutionary movement that was undermining the British state's titanic war effort against France. Pitt helped create a (dubiously) United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in 1801, which meant dissolving the separate Irish Parliament and incorporating one hundred Irish Protestant members into what had been Britain's Parliament. In the process, Pitt half-promised major political concessions to Catholics.

King George III's hostility to compromising the Anglican establishment (and thereby a crown that was already suffering from the war-driven rise of parliamentary power) made that commitment impossible to keep. Pitt's consequent resignation by no means stifled Catholic demands. On the contrary, from 1801 to 1829, Catholic Emancipation remained one of the United Kingdom's thorniest political issues. The 1807 wartime resignation of the coalition "Ministry of All the Talents," for example, pivoted on the king's refusal to endorse the admission of Catholics to high military ranks.



Much more than a king's attachment to Anglican privilege, however, made the issue contentious. Anti-Catholicism continued to enjoy wide popular appeal in Great Britain, the more so as Irish immigration (responding to industrial expansion in Britain and consequent industrial contraction in Ireland) accelerated. On the other side, Irish Catholic elites resisted the even greater separation from important decisions affecting their island's fate that had resulted from the transfer of the old Dublin Parliament's powers—however Protestant it had been—to an English-dominated Parliament in distant Westminster. Repeatedly during the 1820s two movements coincided: an increasingly popular campaign for Catholic political rights led by lawyers, priests, and other elites in Ireland; and a coalition of radicals, reformers, and organized Catholics in support of Emancipation within Great Britain. Eventually a countermovement of Protestant resistance to Catholic claims mobilized as well.

The interweaving movements reached their dénouement in 1829. During the previous six years, Irish Catholic barrister Daniel O'Connell and his allies had organized successive versions of a mass-membership Catholic Association in Ireland, with some following in Great Britain. They perfected a form of organization (drawn initially and ironically from Methodist models) with which radicals and reformers had experimented during the great mobilizations of 1816 to 1819. The association collected a monthly penny—the "Catholic rent"—from thousands of peasants and workers. With the proceeds, it conducted an incessant, effective campaign of propaganda, coalition formation, lobbying, and public claim-making. Each time the British government outlawed their association, O'Connell and friends fashioned a slightly reorganized (and renamed) successor to replace it.

Efforts by Protestant supporters of Emancipation to get a bill through Parliament failed in 1812, failed repeatedly from 1816 to 1822, and failed again in 1825. But in 1828 a related campaign to expand the political rights of Protestant Dissenters (e.g., Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians) by repealing the seventeenth-century Test and Corporation Acts gained parliamentary and royal assent. Although it had the effect of removing important allies from the same side of the barricade, on

balance such an opening made the moment auspicious for Catholic Emancipation. A regime that had defended Anglican supremacy by excluding all non-Anglicans from office in principle (despite frequent exceptions in practice for Dissenters) lost some of its rationale for excluding Catholics.

Meanwhile, Catholic Ireland moved closer to open rebellion. Despite well-organized opposition by Anglican diehards, now augmented by some of the Dissenters who had recently gained fuller political rights, Prime Minister Wellington and Home Secretary Peel finally promoted Catholic Emancipation as a lesser evil. They hoped to mute its effect by narrowing the Irish franchise dramatically, dissolving the Catholic Association definitively, and barring the association's succession to other mass organizations.

The House of Lords and the king presented larger obstacles than did the Commons, which by the early 1820s had on the whole reconciled itself to some expansion of Catholic rights. The Lords included, of course, not only peers of the realm but also bishops of the Anglican church, most of whom would not lightly sacrifice their organization's privileged political position. At their coronations, furthermore, British monarchs swore to defend Anglican primacy; in 1828 King George IV still feared that to approve Catholic Emancipation would violate his coronation oath.

When the House of Lords again forestalled Emancipation in 1828, both Irish organizers and their British allies redoubled the Emancipation campaign, not only expanding the Catholic Association but also staging massive meetings, marches, and petition drives. The technically illegal election of Catholic O'Connell to Parliament from a seat in County Clare during the fall of 1828 directly challenged national authorities, especially when O'Connell proposed to take his place in Westminster at the new Parliament's opening early in 1829.

This formidable mobilization, in turn, stimulated a large countermobilization by defenders of what they called the Protestant Constitution. In Great Britain, and to a lesser extent in Ireland itself, opponents of Emancipation organized Brunswick Clubs to manufacture meetings, marches, petitions, propaganda, and solidarity on behalf of the royal house of Brunswick. That the Commons, the Lords, and the king finally

conceded major political rights—although far from perfect equality—to Catholics during the spring of 1829 resulted from an otherwise unresolvable crisis in both Ireland and Great Britain. It by no means represented a general conversion of Britons to religious toleration. Jews, for example, did not receive similar concessions until 1858. Nor did unofficial discrimination against Jews or Irish Catholics ever disappear from British life. We are speaking here of legal exclusion from political rights on the basis of religious identity.

In 1689, Great Britain built categorical inequality by religion into the very structure of citizenship, with significant consequences for Catholics' conditions of life. In 1829, the United Kingdom eliminated most traces of that inequality from citizenship rights without by any means rendering Catholics and non-Catholics equal in regard to wealth, income, prestige, or power. As in cases of legal discrimination by race, a categorization that initially implemented unequal treatment eventually became an incentive for, and a basis of, political mobilization against discrimination.

Although the vast mobilization of Catholics and their supporters in Great Britain and Ireland succeeded in displacing major barriers to Catholic participation in the United Kingdom's public life, it also laid the ground for a nearly contradictory program: the demand for Irish autonomy and, eventually, independence under Catholic hegemony. In an age of politicized ethnicity and nationalism, politicized Irish Catholics represented themselves as yet another nation denied their own rightful state.

For all its particularities, the history of legally sanctioned religious inequality in the British Isles shares its causal structure with many other varieties of categorical inequality: not only South African racial categories and Balkan ethnicities but also the divisions built into American health care, immigrant niches, local communities, and the ordinary operation of capitalist firms. Whether the organization in question is a state, a firm, or something else, we find exploitation, opportunity hoarding, emulation, and adaptation. We find people who wield power within an organization responding to organizational problems by creating or incorporating categorical differences, elaborating and using interpersonal networks within categorical boundaries, erecting social

markers at the boundaries, transmitting categorical membership to new participants, giving multiple parties a stake in perpetuating the categories, and drawing even persons disadvantaged by their categorical assignment into some form of collaboration with the system. Although contempt, mistrust, and misunderstanding often characterize cross-boundary ties, negative feelings do not in themselves explain such systems of categorical inequality. Even people who do not hate generally collaborate with them.

Within the history of Catholic Emancipation, we witness the creation of social movements as major forms of political interaction, including other struggles over inequality. After 1800 most capitalist countries installed contested elections as ways of staffing their governments, of managing polity membership, and of adjudicating competing claims among polity members. Contested elections designated the members of parliaments and (directly or indirectly) high executive offices. In the same process, however, capitalist countries also generated paraelectoral and paraparliamentary politics in the form of party action, interest-group maneuvering, and social movements. Social movements in particular came to play crucial parts as ways of asserting candidacy for polity membership, of demanding redress, and of getting on the national agenda the issues that parliamentary, executive, and electoral processes were currently neglecting.

#### SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND INEQUALITY

Social movements create or activate paired and unequal categories, with an important twist: they deliberately emphasize the unjust treatment of people on the weaker side of a categorical line and/or the improper behavior of people on the stronger side. The "we" referred to by social-movement activists comprises a whole category (composite or homogeneous) of unjustly treated persons or organizations. The "they" consists of others (industrialists, officials, immoral persons, sometimes competing groups) whose action or inaction allegedly causes the condition that activists are protesting in the name of their presumably aggrieved

constituency. Social movements challenge the exploitation, opportunity hoarding, emulation, and adaptation that occur on the other side of the categorical line and threaten drastic collective action by members of their own constituency. Outsiders' participation in the construction of categories helps to solve four acute organizational problems: mobilizing supporters behind a set of demands, coordinating contentious and often risky action, attracting allies, and—in the case of success—establishing a structure for the distribution and hoarding of benefits gained.

A social movement is a kind of campaign, parallel in many respects to an electoral campaign. This sort of campaign, however, demands righting of a wrong, most often a wrong suffered by a well-specified population. It constructs that population as a category, often as a categorical candidate for polity membership. The population in question can range from a single individual to all humans, or even all living creatures. Whereas an electoral campaign pays off chiefly in the votes that finally result from it, a social movement pays off in effective transmission of the message that its program's supporters are WUNC (Worthy, Unified, Numerous, and Committed). These four elements compensate one another to some degree; for example, a high value on worthiness ("respectability" in the language of 1829) can make up for small numbers. Yet a visibly low value on any one of these elements (a public demonstration of unworthiness, division, dwindling numbers, and/or outright defection) discredits the whole movement.

Social-movement campaigning involves a familiar bundle of performances: creating associations and coalitions, organizing marches and demonstrations, circulating petitions, attending public meetings, shouting slogans, wearing badges, writing pamphlets, and more. Seen as means-end action, such a campaign has a peculiar diffuseness; compared with striking, voting, smashing the loom of a nonstriking weaver, or running a miscreant out of town, its actions remain essentially symbolic, cumulative, and indirect, with almost no chance that any single event will achieve its stated objective of ending an injustice or persuading authorities to enact a needed law. Social-movement mobilization gains its strength from an implicit threat to act in adjacent arenas: to withdraw support from public authorities, to provide sustenance to a

regime's enemies, to ally with splinter parties, to move toward direct action or even rebellion. Skilled social-movement organizers draw tacitly on such threats to bargain with the objects of their demands.

Social movements take place as conversations—not as solo performances but as interactions among parties. The most elementary set of parties consists of an actor making a claim, the object of the actor's claim, and an audience having a stake in the fate of at least one of the first two. Whatever else they do, movements dramatize categorical differences between claimants and objects of claims. But allies, competitors, enemies, authorities, and multiple audiences also frequently play parts in movement interactions. Therein lies the complexity of social-movement organizing, not to mention the complexity of responses by authorities and objects of claims; third parties always complicate the interaction.

Examined from the viewpoint of challengers, a social movement's success depends in part on two varieties of mystification. First, as they increase, worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment almost necessarily contradict each other; to gain numbers, for example, generally requires compromise on worthiness, unity, and/or commitment. The actual work of organizers consists recurrently of patching together provisional coalitions, suppressing risky tactics, negotiating which of the multiple agendas that participants bring with them will find public voice in their collective action, and, above all, hiding backstage struggle from public view. They almost always exaggerate their coalition's WUNC.

Second, movement activists seek to present themselves and (if different) the objects of their solicitude as a solidary group, preferably as a group with a long history and with a coherent existence outside the world of public claim-making. In that regard, they resemble state-seeking nationalists with their constructions of long, coherent, distinctive cultural histories for their nations. Thus feminists identify themselves with women's age-old struggles for rights in the streets and in everyday existence, civil rights leaders minimize class and religious differences within their racial category, and environmentalists present most of humankind as their eternal community. Organizers of the Catholic

Emancipation campaign, including Daniel O'Connell, spent much of their energy striving to create a united public front and portraying their constituents as a long-suffering solidary population who had waited far too long for justice.

The two varieties of mystification address several different audiences. They encourage activists and supporters to make high estimates of the probability that fellow adherents will take risks and incur costs for the cause, hence that their own contributions will bear fruit. They warn authorities, objects of claims, opponents, rivals, and bystanders to take the movement seriously as a force that can affect their fates.

Movements differ significantly in the relative attention they give to these various audiences, from self-absorbed tests of daring organized by small clusters of terrorists to signature of petitions by transient participants who want some authority to know their opinion. These orientations frequently vary in the course of a given social movement, for example, in transitions from internal building to ostentatious action to fighting off competitors and enemies.

Neither in the case of Catholic Emancipation nor in general does mystification mean utter falsehood. Activists and constituents of social movements vary considerably in the extent to which they actually embody worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment and in the degree to which they spring from a single solidary group with a collective life outside the world of public politics. To the extent that the two varieties of mystification contain elements of truth, furthermore, social movements generally mobilize more effectively. A segregated ethnic community threatened by outside attack, on the average, mobilizes more readily than does the entire category consisting of all those who suffer from diverse attacks on civil liberties.

The process whereby social-movement activists achieve recognition as valid interlocutors for unjustly deprived populations does not resemble the fact-finding inquiries of novelists, social scientists, or investigative reporters. It resembles a court proceeding, in which those who make such claims, however self-evident to them, must establish themselves in the eyes of others—authorities, competitors, enemies, and relevant audiences—as voices that require attention and must commonly

establish themselves in the face of vigorous opposition. They must prove that they qualify. Almost all such proofs entail suppression of some evidence and exaggeration of other evidence concerning the claimants' WUNC and their grounding in a durable, coherent, solidary, deprived population. Again, resemblances to state-seeking nationalism immediately strike the mind's eye.

Analysts of collective action, especially those who entertain sympathy for the actions they are studying, often insist on these mystified elements as intrinsic to social movements: the presence of solidarity, the construction of shared identities, the sense of grievance, the creation of sustaining organizations, and more. Without such features, analysts say, we have nothing but ordinary politics. Sometimes the myths fulfill themselves, building up the lineaments of durable connection among core participants. But most social movements remain far more contingent and volatile than their mystifications allow; these other elements do not define the social movement as a distinctive political phenomenon.

What does? Social movements involve collective claims on authorities. A social movement consists of a sustained challenge to powerholders in the name of a population living under the jurisdiction of those powerholders by means of repeated public displays of that population's numbers, commitment, unity, and worthiness. We, the aggrieved, demand that you, the perpetrators of evil or the responsible authorities, act to alleviate a condition about which we are justly indignant. Although some of our actions may express support for proposals, programs, or persons that are already advancing our aims, most of our displays dramatize not only our own WUNC but also the existence of conditions we oppose.

As they developed in Great Britain and other Western European countries during the early nineteenth century, characteristic social-movement displays (whose relative weight varied considerably from movement to movement) included creating special-purpose associations; lobbying officials; organizing public meetings, demonstrations, and marches; circulating petitions; writing pamphlets; publicizing statements in mass media; posting or wearing identifying signs; and adopting distinctive slogans. Although the advocates and opponents of



Catholic Emancipation had by no means mastered this full array of techniques in 1828 and 1829, they tried them all. They were, indeed, inventing the social movement as they went along.

Let me stress the fact of invention. For all its contentiousness, most of human history has proceeded without social movements as such. Rebellions, revolutions, avenging actions, rough justice, and many other forms of popular collective action have abounded, but not the associating, meeting, marching, petitioning, propagandizing, sloganeering, and brandishing of symbols that mark social movements.

With some eighteenth-century precedents, this complex of interactions emerges as a way of doing political business in Western Europe during the nineteenth century; however we finally sort out the priorities, Britain shares credit for the invention. In Great Britain, the actual inventors were political entrepreneurs such as John Wilkes, Lord George Gordon, William Cobbett, Daniel O'Connell, and Francis Place. They, their collaborators, and their followers bargained out space for new forms of political action—bargained it out with local and national authorities, with rivals, with enemies, with the objects of their claims. The tales of contention over Catholic Emancipation in March 1829 provide glimpses of that bargaining.

Social movements, then, center on the construction of categorical identities. Identities in general are shared experiences of distinctive social relations and the representations of those social relations. Workers become workers in relation to employers and other workers; women become women in relation to men and other women; Orthodox Jews become Orthodox Jews in relation to non-Jews, non-Orthodox Jews, and other Orthodox Jews. Like social movements, nationalism and religious qualifications for citizenship involve the construction and enforcement of unequal, paired categories.

#### POLITICAL IDENTITIES

Political identities are the subset of identities to which governments are parties. For all the enormous variation in the form and content of political identities, we can assert that the following propositions are true:

- Political identities are always and everywhere relational and collective.
- Most political identities are also categorical rather than specific to a tie between two particular actors.
- Political identities therefore alter as political networks, opportunities, and strategies shift.
- The validation of political identities depends on contingent performances to which other parties' acceptance or rejection of the asserted relation is crucial.
- That validation both constrains and facilitates collective action by those who share the identity.
- Deep differences separate political identities that are embedded in routine social life from those that appear chiefly in public life (embedded and disjoined collective identities).

These propositions break with three very different but common ways of understanding political identities: first, as straightforward activations of durable personal traits, whether individual or collective; second, as malleable features of individual consciousness; third, as purely discursive constructions.

The first view appears incessantly in interest-based accounts of political participation, which generally depend on some version of methodological individualism. The second view recurs in analyses of political commitment as a process of self-realization and correlates closely with an assumption of phenomenological individualism, the doctrine that personal consciousness is the primary—or, at a solipsistic extreme, the only—social reality. The third appears repeatedly in postmodern accounts of identity, many of which likewise lean toward solipsism. My own view denies neither discursive construction, personal traits, nor individual psyches but rather places relations among actors at the center of social processes.

What does “relational and collective” mean? A *political identity* is an actor's experience of a shared social relation in which at least one of the parties—including third parties—is an individual or an organization controlling concentrated means of coercion within some substantial territory. Political identities usually double with shared public *representa-*

tions of both relation and experience. Thus at various times the same people represent themselves as workers, local residents, ethnics, women, citizens, gays, partisans, and other categories that distinguish them from other parts of the population. In each case they engage in authenticating performances that establish worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment—for example, by marching together, wearing badges, singing songs of solidarity, or shouting slogans.

Under specifiable social conditions, collective identities that people deploy in the course of contention correspond to *embedded identities*, those that inform their routine social lives: race, gender, class, ethnicity, locality, kinship, and so on. Observers tend to label as either “spontaneous” or “traditional” the forms of collective vengeance, shaming, obstruction, and mutual manipulation that spring from embedded identities. Observers also commonly imagine the central causal mechanisms to be transformations of individual consciousness, when in fact selective fortification of certain social ties and divisions at the expense of others impels the mobilization. Although they usually operate at a small scale, when they are under attack by powerholders and enemies embedded identities such as religious affiliation and ethnicity can become the basis of fierce, extensive contention. The Protestant Reformation and the breakup of the Soviet Union featured just such activation of embedded identities.

Under other conditions, people turn to *disjoined identities*, ones that as such rarely or never govern everyday social relations. Disjoined collective identities often include associational memberships, asserted nationalities, and legal categories such as “minority,” “tribe,” or “military veteran.” In these cases, participants invoke salient social ties much more selectively than is the case with embedded identities. Political entrepreneurs, on the average, play much larger parts in their activation. Beth Roy’s analysis of how Bengali villagers came to redefine local conflicts as aligning “Hindus” against “Muslims” beautifully illustrates such entrepreneurially mediated mobilization: the farther the intervening political entrepreneurs were situated from the particular village and the more heavily they were involved in national politics, the more they invoked generally recognizable categories (Roy 1994).

The distinction between embedded and disjoined collective identities marks endpoints of a continuum. The collective identity "citizen," for example, falls somewhere in between, typically shaping relations between employers and workers and strongly affecting political involvements but making little difference to a wide range of other social routines. The embedded-disjoined distinction denies, however, two common (and contradictory) ways of understanding the identities that prevail in contentious politics: either as simple activations of preexisting, even primordial, individual attributes or as pure discursive constructions having little or no grounding in social organization. From embedded to disjoined, collective identities resemble linguistic genres in entailing coherent interpersonal collaboration but varying contingently in content, form, and applicability from setting to setting.

The embedded-disjoined contrast also parallels my earlier distinction between interior and exterior categorical pairs. An identity based on location in a categorical pair counts as embedded in a given setting to the extent that people organize a wide range of routine social interactions around it, disjoined to the extent that it becomes salient only on special occasions. Thus, from the perspective of most firms, membership or nonmembership in a sports team remains invisible most of the time; but on the day before a big match, it becomes a basis of differentiation. Within schools, however, sports team membership often makes a difference for a wide range of social relations; it operates in the interior as an embedded category.

Reinforced by contention, internal organization, or acquisition of privileges, disjoined identities sometimes become salient in everyday social relations as well, but they begin elsewhere. Through its various policies from 1903 to 1981, as we have seen, the South African state reified and ratified racial categories that eventually came to loom large in social routines. Eventually, the state and its diverse agents mapped such categories as Zulu, Xhosa, Afrikaner, and Coloured onto the entire population with such force that the categories governed significant shares of everyday social relations. Thus initially disjoined collective identities embedded themselves.

Through sharpening categorical boundaries and promoting shared

activities, participation in social movements has likewise partially embedded disjoined identities in routine social life among women, ethnic minorities, or military veterans. The process also runs in the other direction, generalizing and disjoining embedded identities, as when carpenters in one shop, machinists in another, and pipefitters in a third band together not in those identities but as generalized workers. Nevertheless, the distinction matters: the degree to which political identities are embedded or disjoined strongly affects the quantity of widely available knowledge they draw on, the density of underpinning social ties, the strength of conflicting commitments, the ease of emulation from one setting to another, and therefore the effectiveness of different organizing strategies.

The distinction between embedded and disjoined collective identities corresponds approximately to the difference between local contention and national social-movement politics in early nineteenth-century Europe, when a major shift toward the national arena was transforming popular politics (Tarrow 1994; Traugott 1995). As they made claims through such forms of interaction as shaming ceremonies, grain seizures, and the burning of effigies, people generally deployed collective identities corresponding closely to those that prevailed in routine social life: householder, carpenter, neighbor, and so on. We can designate these forms of interaction as *parochial* and *particularistic*, since they ordinarily occurred within localized webs of social relations, incorporating practices and understandings peculiar to those localized webs. They also often took a *patronized* form, relying on appeals to privileged intermediaries for intercession with more distant authorities.

In demonstrations, electoral campaigns, and public meetings, on the other hand, participants often presented themselves as party supporters, association members, citizens, and similar disjoined collective identities. These types of claim-making can be described as *national*, *modular*, and *autonomous*, calling attention to their frequent fixation on national issues and objects, their standardization from one setting or issue to another, and the frequency with which participants directly addressed powerholders they did not see in everyday social contacts. The difference signified large contrasts in social relations among participants,

mobilization patterns, and the organization of action itself. The shift from parochial, particularistic, often patronized forms of claim-making to autonomous, national, and modular forms articulated with profound alterations in social structure.

These shifts in Europe's predominant forms of claim-making of course took place in different versions at different times and paces from one region to another. Altogether, they constituted a dramatic alteration of contentious *repertoires*. Repertoires of contention resemble conversational conventions linking particular sets of interlocutors to each other: far narrower than the technical capacities of the parties would allow or their interests alone prescribe, repertoires form and change through mutual claim-making itself. Like economic institutions that evolve through interaction among organizations but significantly constrain the forms of economic relations at any particular point in time, they limit possibilities for collective action and interaction (Nelson 1995).

Evolution of the demonstration as a means of claim-making, to take an obvious example, tilts activists, police, spectators, rivals, and political officials toward well-defined ways of organizing, anticipating, and responding to the claims made in this medium and to sharp distinctions from claims laid by bombing or bribing (Favre 1990). Strikes, sit-ins, mass meetings, and other forms of claim-making link well-defined identities to each other, involve incessant innovation, and change configuration over the long run but accumulate their own histories, memories, lore, laws, and standard practices. Repertoires, in short, are historically evolving, strongly constraining, cultural products. They combine emulation and adaptation almost seamlessly.

What difference, then, does the presence or absence of a government make to the operation of exploitation and opportunity hoarding? Politicization of categorical inequality increases the salience of government-enforced law, of coercive means, and of polity positions on either side of categorical boundaries. Mobilization of support through elections, social movements, and influence networks becomes a means by which those contesting control of particular resources—whether government-dominated or otherwise—increase their leverage. Since, however, current control of crucial resources augments the capacity of any actor to

mobilize political support through elections, influence networks, and even social movements, in ordinary circumstances the operations of states sustain existing patterns of categorical inequality rather than subverting them.

## INEQUALITY AND BASIC POLITICAL PROCESSES

The previous discussion implies a general answer to our second question, the issue of how the character and extent of categorical inequality in an organization or population affect its basic political processes. Clearly, they affect those processes profoundly. Categorical inequality forms one of the major grounds and constraints of political life. Let me take up just one implication, the relation between inequality and democracy. Let us call a polity democratic to the extent that it features these elements:

Broad citizenship

Equal citizenship

Binding consultation of citizens with respect to state personnel and performance

Protection of citizens, especially members of minorities, against arbitrary action by state agents

In one obvious way and two less obvious ways, the definition itself incorporates questions of inequality. By definition, obviously, unequal citizenship (e.g., votes for men only or two-tiered systems of state-guaranteed benefits) diminishes democracy. Since 1792, when the French Revolution abolished distinctions between "active" citizens (that is, essentially, propertied adult males) and "passive" citizens (that is, essentially unpropertied adult males who were nevertheless subject to military service), Western struggles for democracy have frequently centered, precisely, on the equalization of rights among previously distinguished categories of citizens.

Less obviously, narrow citizenship entails substantial inequality with respect to rights within a state's territory; some subjects of the state

enjoy citizenship while others do not. Before 1865 American slaves did not possess citizenship in any meaningful sense of the word. Apartheid South Africa's virtual exclusion of black Africans from citizenship at a national scale constituted one of its most undemocratic features. Kuwait today excludes the great majority of its work force, recruited immigrants, from citizenship.

Where armed forces enjoy autonomous political power, finally, their autonomy constitutes a violation of equal citizenship, binding consultation, and protection. (If you had to judge whether a state was democratic or not on the basis of a single organizational feature, whether the police reported to the military or to civilian authorities would serve as an excellent guide.) Western countries struggled to their halfway democracies only by containing autonomous military power, and those that failed to do so (for example, Spain and Portugal) saw nominally democratic regimes fail repeatedly.

That inequalities within citizenship, inequalities between citizens and noncitizens, or unequal political autonomy between armed forces and civilians violate democracy by definition does not reduce their substantive threat to democratic politics. Outside the zone of definition, deep categorical inequality also threatens democracy. The main dynamic is simple: to the extent that people on the advantaged sides of categorical divides are small in number and rich in resources, they combine the incentive and the capacity to buy their way out of democratic processes. They can and will effectively narrow citizenship, render it unequal, subvert binding consultation, and undermine protection. In popular elections, for example, the co-presence of a few very rich people and many very poor people encourages the buying of candidates, votes, and election judges, as well as extraelectoral patronage. Where elections are relatively honest, exploiters and opportunity hoarders can still afford to protect their interests by buying or subverting state authorities.

Answers to our first two questions—how states relate to the operation of categorical inequality and how the character of categorical inequality affects basic political processes—therefore imply answers to the other two: ascertaining when inequality itself becomes an object of political struggle and when political struggle and/or governmental action



actually changes prevailing patterns of inequality. Let us return to each question briefly.

Because exploitation and opportunity hoarding often involve an effective means of control over members of excluded and subordinated categories, because emulation naturalizes distinctions by making them ubiquitous, and because adaptation ties even exploited groups to the structure of exploitation, most categorical inequality stays in place without sustained, overt struggle. James Scott (1985, 1990) has argued the contrary, indicating that subordinate groups commonly use "weapons of the weak" based on "hidden transcripts" of opposition to subvert powerholders. The histories of landlord-tenant relations, religious inequalities, and social movements indicate, however, that organizers generally have a difficult time stimulating shared awareness of oppression and determination to resist, that even with intense organizing efforts they fail except in special structural circumstances.

What are these circumstances? In the broadest terms, they occur when the benefits from exploitation and opportunity hoarding decline and/or the costs of exploitation, opportunity hoarding, emulation, and adaptation increase. In those circumstances, the beneficiaries of categorical inequality tend to split, with some of them becoming available as the underdogs' allies against other exploiters and hoarders. Contradictions between beliefs sustaining categorical boundaries and day-to-day social life then become more visible, which undermines inequality-sustaining beliefs and practices both by making justification more difficult and by promoting mobilization in the name of justice. When the altered structural position of a subordinated population increases its leverage or internal connectedness—as when Irish soldiers became more essential to British armies and Irish workers more essential to British industry—eventually the costs of controlling that population expand, along with capacity to resist control. Finally, exploiters themselves sometimes inadvertently create opportunities for claim-making, as when British rulers' concessions to organized Protestant Dissenters in 1828 weakened their grounds for excluding organized Catholics in 1829, or when the U.S. government's modest concessions to black civil rights demands in the 1960s established a powerful model for claim-making on behalf of other

subordinated populations such as women, gays, older people, Hispanics, Native Americans.

The principles and cases we have been exploring recommend rough distinctions among top-down, competitive, and bottom-up situations. From the *top down*, inequality typically becomes an object of political struggle when would-be exploiters or opportunity hoarders seek to subordinate or exclude from relevant resources members of categories that have previously held collective rights to more favorable circumstances. State-led nationalism's generation of resistance by minorities provides a case in point, but so do plant shutdowns that incite worker takeovers.

Among *competitive* situations, the invasion of an established ethnic occupational niche by members of a new immigrant population frequently causes bitter conflict. So, as we have seen, does the confrontation of rival claimants to statehood within the same territory. Both internal changes (e.g., shifts in the demographic balance between two previously accommodated populations) and external changes (e.g., collapse of a previously restraining national authority) generate such struggles (Margadant 1992; Olzak 1992). For recent American history, Orlando Patterson describes the "paradox of desegregation":

When blacks and whites were segregated from each other there was little opportunity for conflict. The two groups lived in largely separate worlds, and when they did come in contact their interactions were highly structured by the perverse etiquette of racial relations. The system may have worked well in minimizing conflict, as long as both groups played by the rules, but it was clearly a pernicious arrangement for blacks since it condemned them to inferior status and excluded them from participation in the political life of their society and from nearly all the more desirable opportunities for economic advancement.

Desegregation meant partial access to the far superior facilities and opportunities open previously only to whites. Hence, it entailed a great improvement in the condition and dignity of blacks. All this should be terribly obvious, but it must be spelled out because it is precisely this obvious improvement that is so often implicitly denied when we acknowledge one of the inevitable consequences of desegregation: namely that, as individuals in both groups meet more and more, the possibility for conflict is bound to increase. (Patterson 1995, 26)

Patterson is identifying a crucial aspect not only of recent African American experience but of inequality's competitive politics in general.

From the *bottom up*, South African experience gives us insight into situations where members of subordinate categories acquire increased collective capacity to withhold valuable resources, resist control, exploit elite divisions, and enlist outside allies. Parallels with British Catholics' demands for political participation, American blacks' mobilization for civil rights, and Western women's campaigns for equal pay should become obvious. In short, classic conditions for collective action obtain (Calhoun 1991; Marwell and Oliver 1993; Oliver 1993; Tarrow 1994; Traugott 1995).

When do struggle and/or governmental action change—even reduce—prevailing patterns of inequality? When members of subordinate categories not only mobilize broadly but actually gain power, substantial alterations of inequality often occur rapidly. In the extreme case of revolutions, alliances of underdogs with fragments of the ruling coalition, acquisition of armed force by members of a revolutionary coalition, neutralization or defection of the regime's armed force, and revolutionary control over some significant part of the state apparatus all promote the overturning of the old regime.

Short of revolution, similar conditions foster extensive change in inequality. In South Africa, for example, fragmentation of the white elite not only provided opportunities for black mobilization but also opened up alliances that facilitated black sharing of power. The increasing reliance of white-controlled urban enterprises on black labor; the consequent mismatch between the apartheid system of control and the actual daily movements of the black population; black mobilization within the townships, enclaves, and migration networks that had been created or reinforced by apartheid arrangements; and international sanctions against the regime and its major corporations—all these conditions not only increased the costs to political elites of operating the system of categorical inequality but also diminished returns to holders of capitalist property. These circumstances inclined some members of the ruling coalition to form alliances across categorical boundaries and made their still-resisting fellow rulers more vulnerable to attack. Although income

and wealth inequality still divide South Africans more deeply than in almost any other country of the world, at least in the public sector substantial equalization occurred within a few years. Over the medium run, that shift in political power will most likely cause some equalization in wealth, income, education, health, housing, and living conditions across what had been one of the world's starkest divisions of categorical inequality.

South Africa's partial revolution does not bespeak a worldwide trend toward equality. Material inequality is increasing in the major capitalist countries, while in many parts of the world political mobilization on behalf of religious, ethnic, and national categories is promoting new, destructive forms of inequality. These two trends toward inequality make democracy more difficult to sustain or achieve. To the extent that categorical differences in life chances by race, gender, ethnicity, citizenship, and other well-marked boundaries already divide social life, those visible differences, their sustaining practices, and their rationalizing beliefs are readily available for incorporation into new forms of exploitation and opportunity hoarding. In addition to inequality's immediate effects on welfare, threats to democracy give us one more reason for worrying about the general trend toward inequality in the capitalist and postsocialist worlds.