

**SOCIOLOGY 929**  
**Reading Interrogations, session 7**  
**October 17, 2006**  
**Marx-Weber Amalgams I: Tilly**

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**1. Adam Slez**

Offering a relational critique of conventional individualistic accounts of social inequality, Charles Tilly argues that “significant inequalities in advantages among human beings correspond mainly to categorical differences...rather than to individual differences in attributes, propensities, or performances” (Tilly 1998: 7). The durability of categorical inequalities is the result of a pairing between categorical and hierarchical social relations. Tilly’s focus on this type of structural pairing is derived from the premise that “exploitation, opportunity hoarding, emulation, and adaptation converge to favor such a social arrangement and that its widespread insertion in organizations accounts for a major share of all durable inequality” (Tilly 1998: 59). According to Tilly, categorical inequalities tend to be institutionalized within organizational forms because they solve certain organizational problems related to the distribution of scarce resources. More specifically, Tilly notes that “the installation of widely available exterior categories at boundaries defined by exploitation and opportunity hoarding lower the costs of maintaining categorical inequality” (Tilly 1998: 86). Once categorical inequalities become institutionalized within a given organization, they tend to be perpetuated and legitimated through emulation and adaptation across the organizational field.

While it is plausible to suggest that the inequalities become increasingly durable by virtue of their insertion into organizational forms, there seems to be an explicitly functionalist logic to the argument that categorical boundaries tend to be reflected in organizational forms because they solve organizational problems. Before settling on this conclusion, I think that it is important to be certain that I am not overstating the claim being made by Tilly. Tilly’s argument would be undeniably functionalist if he said that categorical inequalities were created and recreated **for the purpose** of solving a particular set of organizational problems. **[EOW: Strictly speaking, invoking the purposes that motivated the creation of a structure is not a general requirement of a functional explanation. Indeed, some people – like Jon Elster – would say that if a property of a structure was created by design it is a candidate for an intentional explanation, but not a functional explanation. While I think Elster’s claim is too restrictive, functional explanations generally only require that the stability of a property be explained functionally (i.e. by the benefit it confers on the larger system of which it is a part), not that its creation is explain purposively.]** To some extent, I don’t think that Tilly cares where these inequalities come from initially. Regardless of whether they are invented or produced via network interactions, categorical distinctions serve as a basis for the construction of the scripts and local knowledge which guide action within an organization. The source of categorical distinctions only matters insofar as it determines the in order in which scripts and local knowledge are generated (Tilly 1998: 69).

Furthermore, the fact that there may be truth to the claim that the installation of exterior categories within an organization potentially lowers the cost of maintaining

categorical inequalities says nothing about the extent to which actors actually rely on this type of strategy. On the one hand, this indicates that the linkage between organizational problems and categorical inequalities may not be as tight as would be suggested by a stricter reading of Tilly's argument, meaning that we might not be totally justified in calling Tilly's argument functionalist. In other words, the weak form of Tilly's argument simply says that *when* actors internalize external categorical distinctions for the purposes of justifying an unequal division of resources within the organization, categorical inequalities tend to be reproduced. The weak form of the argument says nothing about the necessity of external categorical distinctions. On the other hand, the fact that Tilly makes no claim about actors' propensity to rely on this strategy of organizational problem solving suggests that much of Tilly's argument rests on what appears to be an unverified premise. **[I am not completely sure I understand the implications of the contrast between what are characterizing as the weak form and strong form of the argument. Tilly is trying to explain why certain kinds of inequalities are so durable. If there was no tendency for actors to rely on the mechanisms he posits for securing and reproducing advantages, then how would his arguments constitute an explanation of durability?]**

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## 2. Rudolfo Elbert

According to Tilly exploitation and opportunity hoarding, are the causal mechanisms that generate a persistent inequality when social agents impose paired and unequal categories in crucial organizational limits (p. 22). I would like to focus my interrogation on his notion of exploitation that Tilly defines as the process through which powerful and connected persons deploy certain resources from which they obtain significantly increased utilities thanks to the coordinated effort of others, whom are excluded from getting the value added by that effort. I would like to ask some questions about this notion of exploitation: 1. Is this a Marxist term or it is related to what Wright calls the *shadow of exploitation in Weber*? **[I think this is a very Marxian way of talking about exploitation since there is explicit mention of "value added by effort". This is appropriation of the surplus product for all practical purposes.]** 2. If it is a marxist inspired term, what is its relationship with Wright's notion of exploitation? Is it that the only difference is that Wright applies it to identify individual's location in an exploitative relation and Tilly applies it to relations between collectives? **[You raise an interesting issue: the distinction between exploitation of individuals vs collectives. I wonder if these might not be the same and it is just a question of how one is talking about things. Does Tilly really mean that the category is exploited but not the individuals? And is there a difference between saying a person is exploited by virtue of being in category X, where the category is defined by the relation to category Y, and saying that category Y exploits category X?]** 3. When he talks about the appropriation of added value is he talking about surplus labour or not? **[This is not strictly identical to "surplus" for there is no distinction being made between necessary labor (labor which reproduces the worker) and surplus labor – or the necessary product and surplus products. "Value added" just means the value the worker adds through the expenditure of effort, and the claim is just that some of this is appropriated by others. One interpretation of this is that this part is**

**“surplus”, but Tilly could argue that the worker appropriates part of the surplus also.] 4.**

If the collective approach to exploitation is the main feature of this approach, what methodological implications does this have for the empirical study of inequality? Is it that we can only develop a socio-historical analysis of exploitative relations between social groups, like his analysis on the genesis of the South African apartheid? 5. Finally, in relation to his relational perspective I would like to discuss what would be Tilly's critique to the class analysis models that we have discussed so far and which focus on class locations of individuals to explain the class structure of a society.

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### 3. Michael Callaghan Pisapia

Charles Tilly writes that “in order to explain categorically unequal rewards for work within firms [and organizations more generally], we must separate two questions analysts of inequality ordinarily conflate: Why and how do such organizations build unequal categories into their daily operations? Why and how do such interior categories come to incorporate certain widely established exterior categories: gender, race, ethnicity educational background?” (Tilly 1998: 108). In setting up the questions in this way, Tilly directs our attention to the interplay between categorical boundaries interior to organizations and categorical boundaries in play on a wider basis. This interplay does a lot of work in his theory towards explaining “reinforced inequality” that persists over time. First, it is unclear to what the causal direction of this interplay is: clearly, exterior categories may be employed to reinforce/create interior categories, but, does this process ever go the other way? **[In a stable system of durable inequality the causes clearly go in both directions: the internalization of exterior boundaries inside of an organization helps to reproduce the external boundaries/categories. I don't think Tilly believes that these could create external boundaries, but they can sustain them against forces which would otherwise corrode them.]** Can interior categories from several institutions converge in unanticipated ways in the broader society to reinforce/create exterior categories there? **[Reinforcement is certainly plausible, but I am not sure about creation. Can you concoct an example where this might be plausible?]** It seems like there would be some kind of mutually enforcing process at work: the reality of exterior categories becoming more entrenched precisely because of activated interior categories, for example.

Second, it is unclear to me how central the organizational/economic imperative to reduce transaction costs is in Tilly's theory. It seems to me that the interplay among interior and exterior categories could proceed in ways other than according to an economic logic. So, when Tilly argues that unequal life chances (in terms of wages, etc) that flow from interior categorical boundaries to individuals may be explained in terms of an imperative (pushed consciously or inadvertently by power-holders) to reduce the costs of exploitative and opportunity-hoarding “transactions” within those organizations, is the reduction of costs the only (or even the predominant) process in play? If there are other processes that help explain why external categories are emulated in organizations, what are they? **[This raises lots of interesting issues. I don't think that Tilly would claim that transaction cost reduction is the only relevant force in play here, but he might**

**argue that it is the force in play that is most uniform across time and place – across all forms of durable inequality – whereas the other kinds of processes are likely to be contingent. He certainly provides no real indicators about how one would test these claims, what would count as evidence against them, etc.]** I understand that organizational transactions are costly because the distribution of differential rewards to different categories of people does not proceed without organizational friction (workers may object to differences in wages, for example). I also understand that costs are reduced by matching exterior, paired and unequal social categories onto interior, paired and unequal categories that exist in specific organizations. The potentially costly procedure of assigning individuals to different jobs (administrator/teacher, for example) and justifying the differential rewards that are channeled through the organizational structure, becomes less costly precisely because it has matched (imported, emulated) paired and unequal categories – such as male/female – that already have a dominant/subordinate valence, onto its local or interior categorical boundary of administrator/teacher, with *its* dominant/subordinate valence. But isn't it equally likely that interior categorical distinctions between administrator/teacher form not in order to solve an organizational problem, but form instead because social actors in organizations already think/evaluate in terms of male/female-dominant/subordinate relations, and that because of that mental schema, they end up acting in ways in the organization so as to reproduce external schema within the organization? **[In your example this does not really seem too plausible to me since the administrator/teacher division occurs even in schools that are all male or all female and predates the specific gender configurations we see today. The hierarchical division is driven by organizational issues, I think, and then the question is what other mechanisms make it work well or badly.]** For example, *absent* a distinction between administrators and teachers within schools and the power relation that distinction entails, “men” and “women” in that setting who already take themselves to be men and women with all the scripts that go along with those roles, **would not know how to behave towards one another in the local organization. [I'm not sure I completely follow this train of reasoning: men and women know how to behave towards each other even when they are not in a hierarchical relation of this sort – not all jobs are sex segregated, and in the mixed settings men and women “know how” to behave. So I don't see how the melding of gender division with vertical organization division is a necessary condition for the gender division to work. Am I missing something here?]** Thus, the exterior category is imported not to solve an economic problem, but to smooth over a cognitive/psychological one, in which actors are used to certain patriarchal power relations and need to see evidence of that power relation in specific contexts, lest social activity become insensible. Tilly quotes Tomsaskovic-Devey as arguing that “jobs and organizational structure may be fundamentally influenced by gender,” and seems to disagree with that claim (Tilly 1998: 134). I don't really understand his criticism: if a theory of patriarchy does not do more explanatory work than organizational logic, why not? **[You are absolutely correct that gender relations can influence job structures. The job “personal secretary” is heavily shaped by the gender relations which drive it. The same for nursing: the nurse/doctor job relation would be quite different if nurses were men.]**

Third, I'm not sure why dichotomous categories matter so much to Tilly. Is the point that people think in binary ways, so that theorists of social inequality should also do the same? Is it really true that the white/Mexican paired and unequal category determines in a binaristic way (albeit figuratively and contingently, depending on the other paired categories that come into play) the differential rewards that flow to the occupiers of different jobs? When, in the context of restaurant jobs, it seems to be the case that "Mexicans" are dishwashers and "whites" are waiters, it is obviously true that not all Mexicans are dishwashers, and that some may be waiters. Thus the exterior categorical meaning of "Mexican" in the local context of restaurants is not exhausted by the local categorical meaning of "dishwasher", and it is entirely possible from a methodological standpoint, to introduce more nuance into the way the exterior category plays out in the local context. One can do this with fuzzy-sets analysis advanced by Charles Ragin. Each person working in a restaurant is either in, out, or more or less in the category of "Mexican" and can be assigned a discrete value according to his degree of membership in that category. Why not proceed in our study of inequality through fuzzy-sets rather than through dichotomous pairs? **[Interesting suggestion. I suppose the riposte would be that the durability of durable inequalities is enhanced when there is a clear boundary, and boundariness always implies a binary, in the sense of the demarcation of being on one side or the other. The fuzzy boundary cases would tend to degenerate into gradient inequalities which are less potent, less durable, and which secure the privileges of the elites in less robust ways – Tilly would say.]**

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#### 4. Assaf Meshulam

Tilly's work does present a very interesting picture of social processes and structures and relations that produce inequality, along with elaborating on its causal mechanisms that, according to his perception, transcend time and place (although this is never fully clear how).

The second of the four mechanisms of inequality that Tilly presents is *opportunity hoarding*. Tilly seems to take Weber's life chances and transform it into something that is not neutral or passive and is a tool in the hands of certain groups (not individuals) to the exclusion of other groups. **[In Weber as well there is some discussion of the collective character of life chances in the discussion of social closure – things like credentialing, guild restrictions, etc. Weber talks about the "monopolization" of access to certain kinds of resources, which gets pretty close to "opportunity hoarding"]**. He separates that mechanism from the first one, exploitation, saying that "[i]n opportunity hoarding...beneficiaries do not enlist the efforts of outsiders but instead exclude them from access to the relevant resources" (p. 91). But do not exploiters seek to do this as well? Is this not the purpose of the exploitation, to monopolize resources, or the gains from resources (or means of production under Marx)? Moreover, while, opportunity hoarding can help to understand how petty bourgeoisie can form, it does not help to understand what enables them to be in a position to acquire access to valuable resources to begin with. **[I think you are right here, but I would put it slightly differently: exploitation always involves opportunity hoarding, but opportunity**

**hoarding does not necessarily imply exploitation. Exploiters have to exclude potential exploitees from access to resources otherwise exploitation wouldn't be possible. But nonelites can monopolize an form of opportunity without thereby being able to control the labor effort of anyone. On the other hand, as Rahul has pointed out a number of times in the class discussions, that kind of opportunity hoarding can generate rents which are in effect appropriate of the value added by others in Tilly's terms.]**

Also not clear is what the mechanism of change is in the process of categorical inequality described by Tilly: He describes historical changes in organizations that alter the situation of racial and gender subordinations, which occurred as a product of "[s]truggles by members of subordinate categories ... [that] can obviously promote shifts in their unequal fortunes" (1999: 99). Yet, although he mentions struggles by "members", presumably individual members, he does not leave space for human action in his analysis of the different categories. **[I think by "struggles" Tilly mostly means collective struggles, not individual strategies. He doesn't provide much of a theory of the conditions under which these will be successful or not, but presumably this would have to do with forces which undermine the strong correspondences of the durable inequality mechanisms, thereby rendering them more vulnerable to assault.]** Tilly does suggest a distinction between *direct* and *indirect* effects of unequal categories, where the indirect effect refers to the individual level, the variety of attributes that people bear individually. However, it seems that, in the end for Tilly (p. 103), in the interaction between direct and indirect effects, the latter will still always have greater impact and force because of the high cost of the interaction: "shared beliefs play significant parts in the operation of categorical inequality and limit the organizational alternatives that participants consider ... " (p. 103). Tilly thus ignores those who are willing to pay the expensive "transaction costs" in order to fight for their beliefs, even if they are not shared by their organizations. **[The "transaction costs" are costs experienced by elites in sustaining their privilege. Here – I think – you are talking about the costs-of-struggle of non-elites who might try to challenge durable inequalities. right?]**

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## 5. Sarbani Chakraborty

I felt that the word "organization" was too broadly defined in Tilly's book, "Durable Inequality". It was meant to include "all sorts of well-bounded clusters of social relations in which occupants of at least one position have the right to commit collective resources to activities reaching across the boundary." (p.9). By this tentative definition, will a class-position (e.g. working class) itself be termed as an organization, where there are well-bounded clusters within a particular class position? **[I don't see how a class position satisfies the definition the proposes. The organization is a bounded cluster of social relations and a class position isn't a cluster of relations. Members of the working class could form a working class organization – a union for example. And they work within a capitalist firm, which is an organization. But the class positions as such are not "organizations.]"** There seems to be a difference but I am not sure where exactly the difference lies. The organizational concept becomes more complex if we take

exploitation and opportunity hoarding concepts. Then the *organization* of working class as a well-bounded cluster *becomes* working class *due* to exploitation. Also *because* of the organizational framework of working class, it also *becomes an opportunity hoarding* organization. Then exploitation and opportunity hoarding becomes complimentary aspects. However, this aspect then requires an analysis of competition, which Tilly does not mention in detail. But over all his formulation of organization and its relation to class seems confusing.

In p. 83, Tilly says, “Categorical inequality serves many different exploiters and opportunity hoarders [...] depending on their relations to valuable resources”. However, I could not find any clear exposition on the concept of ‘value’ in his repeated arguments for such resources. Tilly focuses on various micro-relational aspects of society. So are we to assume that resources, which people have reasons to value differ from one context to other? But then it seems that emulation and adaptation mechanisms of society precludes any such variation and *all* people around the world vie for *similar* resources, which are ‘valuable’ to *everybody*. **[I think Tilly’s framework would be relevant for any criterion of value so long as it is the case that the control of resources enable people to acquire such value. The core idea is that power over resources enable people to acquire rewards, and thus people engage in strategies to protect, enhance, monopolize their control over those resources. He focuses on material values – income and the like – but the argument would hold for symbolic rewards so long as they depended on control over resources. The durable inequalities are built around the access to resources, which then explain the distribution of rewards.]**

Does Tilly’s theoretical framework of the durability of inequality lead to a possible durability of class-structure as well? He says, “categorical inequality persists for two main reasons: [...] second, the transaction costs of changing the current circumstances [...] pose serious barriers to deliberate adoption of new organizational models [...]” (p. 82). Exploitation then probably remains unchanged and the class-structure per se persists and only the people within that structure change and the degree of exploitation may change. Is that how we may interpret this statement? **[“Unchanged” is too strong – Tilly does allow for change to occur, both through struggles and through the introduction of new organization forms. His main target in this respect is the idea that changes in beliefs of actors as such have much to do with changing durable inequality.]** Another curiously confusing statement of Tilly’s seems to bolster my interpretation, especially that of the ‘degree’ part. At the end he says, with regard to envisaging steps towards equality of opportunity, “[...] second, constructing [...] alternative paths by which inequality-sustaining organizations *could do similar work* without *pernicious* inequality [...]” (p.246). But the other interpretation could be that inequality will remain but that should not bear harmful or malicious effects on people. Is that possible, if we think about socially constructed inequalities? **[Inequalities could remain that would not have the character of *durable* inequalities if they did not have correspondences to these categorical divisions like gender, race, religion, etc. They would be weaker in that they would not involve these mechanisms which generate excess rewards and intensified privileges.]**

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## 6. Charity Schmidt

\*\*\*Tilly frames his analysis of inequality within a framework of social binaries. While such binaries may be effective in explaining the dynamics of some social relations, such dichotomies rarely reflect the complex nature of social organization and access to resources. What do we see are some of the dangers in theories that promote social binaries? **[Does the theory promote binary categories simply by asserting that these are in fact central components of the formation of durable inequalities?]**

\*\*\*Following that concern, Tilly describes the five (or three) basic building blocks of categorical inequality (p. 47). He describes a triad as consisting of “three sites having ties to each other that are similar in content, although not necessarily similar in valence.” If I understand correctly, Tilly does not refute these building blocks, but recognizes how people utilize them in carrying out social relations. My question is this; if he accepts the process of establishing triads as a potential building block of categorical inequality, doesn't this contradict, or at least problematize, his concept of categorical binaries? My concern is that social binaries do not fully represent the complexity involved in the formation of social relations, access to resources, and the consequential durable inequalities experienced. **[The menu on p48 is meant to be a set of elementary forms. Triads are part of this, but they do not – in his view – constitute the foundation for durable inequalities. If all we had were triads, then durable inequalities would not occur of the sort he describes. Such inequalities specifically build upon the categorical pair and meld it with other types of relational forms. You are right that there is a lot more complexity in the world than in this kind of model, but the issue is what aspects of complexity explain “durable inequality”]**

\*\*\*Tilly claims that “inequalities with respect to autonomous goods reach greater extremes than inequalities with respect to relative goods” (p. 26-27). Is this statement correct, or is it just that access to autonomous goods is more measurable and therefore the extremes are more visible (an example being malnutrition due to lack of access to food vs. perks due to elevated access to prestige)? **[I think he is trying to say something more than just that autonomous goods are measurable. Status goods – what he calls relative goods – can be measurable, but their value depends upon their relation to other goods. In a sense it is like saying you cannot be higher status than the top, but you can continue indefinitely accumulating wealth.]**

\*\*\*I am still perplexed by a statement made by Tilly at the start of the book. On page 15 he states that “Mistaken beliefs reinforce exploitation, opportunity hoarding, emulation, and adaptation but exercise little independent influence on their initiation.” I'm not sure where to start with this line. However, when we talk about racial categories of inequality, is Tilly promoting the idea that false distinctions between the races never invoke racial inequality? Would he say that the categorization of gender is not somehow planted through (false) beliefs in the inherent inequalities between the sexes? **[What he is saying is that those beliefs only have traction because they correspond to categorical inequalities rooted in access to resources, organizations, etc. He is not saying that the beliefs don't matter, but that they wouldn't have much effect if they weren't]**



**closely tied to these material practices.]** I understand that categories of inequality, like those of race and gender, are often formulated for the strengthening of exploitation, and opportunity hoarding that serve to create or reinforce inequality, but it is often mistaken beliefs that are promoted and adopted in order to **initiate** such categorical inequalities. **[The “origins” or “initiation” of a structure is often pretty obscure, but you could certainly be right that at the very beginning of a process of making a durable inequality, strategic actors could create classifications-of-difference and this could help establish the inequality in the first place. I am not sure that Tilly would disagree with this since he is not really talking about the moment of initiation but rather about the system of interconnections that render some inequalities durable and others not. Here his main point comes from the next sentence after the one you quote: “It follows that the reduction or intensification of racist, sexist, or xenophobic attitudes will have relatively little impact on durable inequality, whereas the introduction of certain new organizational forms...will have great impact.”]** Even if they are not truly believed by those who initiate categories of inequality, mistaken beliefs are often assumed by those who use them in social relations. As a currently relevant example, right-wing policy makers may know that the influx of Latino immigrants is not at the root of decreasing jobs for U.S. workers, yet they promote and exploit that ‘mistaken belief’ which is then adopted by their constituents.

## 7. Joe Ferrare

Charles Tilly’s theory provides a structural account of how inequality is produced and reproduced through a relational analysis of the principle causal mechanisms of inequality—exploitation, opportunity hoarding, emulation, and adaptation. I found his line of argument to be compelling, generally accessible, and worthy of productive critique. While there is much to be discussed in his analysis, I will focus my interrogation on two questions:

1. Is opportunity hoarding exclusively reserved for the non-elite and exploitation to the elite? Is the difference between the two causal mechanisms as distinct as Tilly suggests?
2. Do elements of consciousness, such as beliefs and attitudes, have any impact on organizational structures, or are they simply a reflection of such structures?

1. Of the four principle causal mechanisms of inequality introduced in *Durable Inequality*, the concept of “opportunity hoarding” is one that seems the least clear. According to Tilly, *opportunity hoarding* is “the hoarding of opportunities by the nonelite” and occurs when “members of a categorically bounded network acquire access to a resource that is valuable, renewable, subject to monopoly, supportive of network activities, and enhanced by the network’s modus operandi...” (Tilly, 1998:91). Opportunity hoarding compliments exploitation, according to Tilly, but is distinguished from it in that it does not use effort from those outside the boundary.

Tilly suggests that, in general, elites are produced and reproduced through a process of exploitation, and non-elites are left to quibble over remaining resources through the establishment of niches (not yet exploited by elites) (94). However, in another statement (p. 94) Tilly clearly warns against “fusing” exploitation with elites and opportunity hoarding with non-elites, suggesting that there can (and are) elite opportunity hoarders and non-elite exploiters.

If Tilly clearly warns against drawing such conclusions, then why does he make the distinction that opportunity hoarding is a causal mechanism carried out by the non-elite, and exploitation a causal mechanism carried out by the elite? **[I think the point is to show how the notion of advantage and privilege is not something exclusively of relevance to the elites in a structure of inequality. He wants a way of talking about plumbers and figure out how they and other such categories manage to preserve their perhaps petty advantages. Opportunity hoarding does seem to be the main mechanism here. So he emphasizes this association even though it is not perfect.]** It seems as though at some point prior to a group exploiting another there would need to be some form of opportunity hoarding, whereby the members of a categorically bounded network take control of a valuable resource and exclude others from access to said resource. Once a monopoly is gained over the resource (or resources), the group will eventually be in a position to exploit the effort of those who only have their labor power to offer in the market. This suggests that opportunity hoarding can be a prerequisite of exploitation, and therefore is carried out by the elite as well as the non-elite. **[This is absolutely right, and in a sense all exploitation involves a specific kind of opportunity hoarding – the opportunity to exploit.]** Is this what Tilly meant when he said that opportunity hoarding compliments exploitation, or was he simply saying that the two mechanisms operate in a complimentary way toward establishing the categorically unequal distribution of resources (such as the case in which “Indian immigrants acquire exclusive rights to operate lucrative newsstands in and near major business buildings,” (169))? **[I think he meant it in the latter sense]**

It seems to me that exploitation implies some form of opportunity hoarding, but opportunity hoarding does not necessarily imply exploitation.**[right!]** For example, Tilly says, “A firm or an alliance of firms that establishes monopoly or oligopoly over production and sale of a given commodity *simultaneously practices exploitation* within firm boundaries *and opportunity hoarding* with respect to all other potential producers and sellers,” (155, emphasis added). Statements such as this leave some ambiguity around the concept of opportunity hoarding, particularly in the way Tilly argues this is primarily a function performed by non-elite.

2. Do elements of consciousness, such as beliefs and attitudes, have any impact on organizational structures, or are they simply a reflection of such structures?

Tilly does not completely ignore the agent in his analysis, but he does attribute all causal power to structural phenomena. He rejects the notion that beliefs and attitudes form the roots of durable inequality, instead suggesting that such beliefs and attitudes shift with specific categorical relations. For example, Tilly argues that “categorical beliefs result from categorical relations and practices,” and that “beliefs and practices shift together under the pressure of collective experience,” (102). In this sense, Tilly

appears to be making a claim that consciousness (as it relates to beliefs) is a reflection of the organizational structures of society. It is for this reason that he concludes his book with the suggestion that reducing categorical inequality involves an analysis of how categorical inequality operates within organizational structures (in addition to formulating verified counterfactuals, and blocking the importation of exterior categories that match unequal interior categories) instead of arguing for a reform of education and socialization practices.

I partially agree with Tilly that the key to reducing categorical inequality involves structural change. However, I think he is a bit reductive and ignores the ways in which agents actively resist and struggle against oppressive organizational structures. A powerful example of this process is explained by Paul Willis in *Learning to Labor* (1977). Willis argues that in the process of the reproduction of social relations, culture acts as a mediating force between structure and conceptual relationships. Agents, he continues, actively reproduce existing structures through contestation and struggle, and in the process partially penetrate (and transform) those structures. **[But of course the lads in Willis' book end up pretty much subverting their own resistance, dooming themselves to occupying the lower rungs of the structure.]** I think Tilly would argue that such resistance is a form of *adaptation*, in which agents invent “procedures that ease day-to-day interaction,” (97). He would probably go on to argue that these procedures help reproduce and cement categorical inequality. However, if we incorporate the insights of Willis we would have to conclude that such resistance and struggle not only reproduce existing relations, but also serve to partially penetrate the structure of those relations, thus producing new relations. **[Adaptations are new relations; just not new relations that genuinely subvert the formidable structures of durable inequality. I don't think Willis' story is at odds with this.]**

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## 8. You-Geon

The two crucial concepts of exploitation and opportunity hoarding are Tilly's key structural causes of social inequality. Exploitation, the first general mechanism promoting categorical inequality, makes it possible for some well-connected groups of actors to extract returns by harnessing the effort of others and by excluding from the full value added by that effort (Tilly, 1998: 87). The second mechanism, opportunity hoarding, operates when members of a categorically bounded network seek to monopolize access to valued resources for them, by excluding outsiders from access to the relevant resources (91). Tilly makes a distinction between two important concepts in that opportunity hoarding operates not by extracting the efforts of outsiders (or others' labor power), but only by excluding them from access to the relevant resources. Furthermore, according to Tilly's illustration, unlike exploitation which is usually practiced by powerful elites, opportunity hoarding is frequently practiced by non-elites including not only privileged groups but also underrepresented groups such as some immigrant groups. Thus, opportunity hoarding seems to be possible without exploitation in certain situations. However, this distinction does not seem to be clear in the real world. In many cases, elites who have a power to control relative resources and labor power of others are usually opportunity hoarders as well as exploiters. They seem to generate inequality

through both exploitation and opportunity hoarding. Furthermore, I wonder whether immigrant groups generating categorical inequality can be explained only through opportunity hoarding with the absence of exploitation. Sometimes, the relationship between former immigrants and new immigrants or illegal immigrants can be explained by exploitation in particular places or labor markets. In many cases, structurally, new or illegal immigrants are provided as cheap irregular labor forces, and consequently exploited by former immigrants or dominant racial groups. Then, to what extent can the mechanism of opportunity hoarding be independent from that of exploitation? Does it have a power to make structural and durable inequalities without the help of initial exploitation? **[You make very good points about the deeper interconnection of opportunity hoarding and exploitation along non-elites, not just elites – exploitation is certainly not something restricted to the most privileged groups in a structure of durable inequality. I suppose one might still be able to say that the balance between exploitation and opportunity hoarding as the source of privilege shifts as you move from elite to nonelite categories.]**

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## 9. Fabian Pfeffer

Tilly's *Durable Inequality* presents a rich conceptual framework that I believe to successfully fill some gaps in the study of inequality. From the four presented mechanisms that are hold to create and sustain categorical inequalities, I find the concept of 'opportunity hoarding' (OH) the most interesting. First, it provides a means to explain the stability of unequal structures (partly in conjunction with the concept of 'adaptation') through the interest that even the exploited acquire in the maintenance of a system in which they have gained stakes (hoarded opportunities). I do not see the puzzle of the stability of unequal systems resolved in such explicit manner in the approaches discussed so far. **[This argument is not so unlike my "loyalty rents" and "skill rents" as a way of understanding the interests of contradictory locations and how this makes them less polarized and antagonistic to the capitalist class.]** Secondly, and even more interesting to me, OH complements the fundamental Marxist concept of exploitation - as I would argue in contrast to EOW (2000) - on eye level. OH and exploitation are two correlated but distinct causal mechanisms and in Tilly's book I cannot find any argument regarding the primacy of one over the other (cf. also figure 6, p.115). **[The only sense in which Exploitation has a kind of primacy is Tilly's constant emphasis on its centrality to the reproduction of elite privilege, whereas OH is more central to privileges of the nonelite – and since the power and privileges of elites are (arguably) more pivotal to the durability of durable inequalities in the systems as a whole, this would render exploitation more important.]** OH is not solely a post-exploitation strategy of the exploited but occurs independent of work-place relations in a wide variety of social configurations (organizations) and regarding numerous socially valued outcomes. While I regard this as a central strength of Tilly's approach, I would have wished for a clarification of the relationship between OH and the Weberian concept of social closure. **[I think it is basically an identical concept, as far as I can tell.]** If Tilly is soft-spoken about the Marxist foundation of his framework, he is silent about its Weberian influences.

Two more question-style remarks:

1. Being interested in intergenerational processes, I wonder whether Tilly's framework also provides some advantages on this terrain. Specifically, I suspect that his 'organization approach' invites to an investigation of the family as an organization of inner-organizational transfers of 'hoarded opportunities' (e.g. higher education). Again, it might be that the mechanism of OH is not fleshed out well enough in Tilly's work to provide us with more than a general direction of where to start looking for causal mechanisms of intergenerational status transmission. But statements like "human capital [...] consists largely of categorical experience compounded and transmitted" (101) make obvious that Tilly awards status inheritance great weight. **[While I think the word "hoarding" immediately suggests transmission, I think all of the mechanisms of durable inequality figure in intergenerational reproduction of durable inequality and the transmission to new people.]**

2. Tilly does not provide any methodological guidelines for the empirical investigation of inequality; instead we have to infer what kind of empirical agenda his relational approach implies. As indicated above, his analytical focus on organizations might suggest investigating just those: the firm, the family, the neighborhood community, etc. Having answered the question of the correct unit of analysis the more pressing question is whether Tilly's work implies anything about how an empirical relational analysis should look like: network analysis, detection of macro-sociological and historical regularities, ethnography of one organization, etc.?

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## 10. Rahul Mahajan

Having read two books and a book chapter by Tilly this semester, I have almost grown used to the infuriating Tilly style. Start with a cursory, sweeping lit review that is plausible and undoubtedly mostly accurate, with strong but severely overstated critiques of the existing work (and with a strong implication that you are the first to articulate those critiques). Then move on to a "theory" with several broad, vague, heuristic and extremely schematic principles, largely distilled from other people's work but with the gloss that you are the one "putting them together," apply them in a desultory and unsystematic manner to very loosely described situations, making sure not to investigate alternative explanations of those situations that might be no more broad, vague, and schematic than yours. Then suggest that future work in the field be done within the ambit of your "theory." **[You are a tough critic! You are by no means alone in this harsh judgment, but the book also did win the ASA's "Distinguished Book Award" so at least some people felt that he did put different ideas and concepts together in a constructive way.]**

Nice work if you can get it, although I imagine very few of us could.

There are two important things I took away from the book.

First, a statement that inequality manifests itself primarily through discontinuous stratification rather than continuous gradation. Insofar as this is true, it is an intriguing phenomenon that requires explanation – and, as Tilly suggests, the phenomenon points us away from looking at individual outcomes and towards social structures and processes.

Second, a claim that the existing literature on stratification is largely locked into a kind of mindless individualism that ignores larger social structures and processes. I don't know enough of the literature to judge the truth of this. **[This claim of Tilly's is a gross exaggeration.]**

On the other hand, there are severe problems:

1. First and most important, although perhaps not mentioned by the reviewers out of politeness: There's almost no there there. Far from being "ambitious," as Wright characterizes it, the book is vague, schematic, and largely contentless. Does anybody doubt that exploitation, emulation, and adaptation are important mechanisms in human society? So what? What has been explained by this? **[Well, what he *thinks* he has explained is the durable character of durable inequality, rather than simply the inequality itself. Specifically he thinks he has explained by categorical inequalities are so tough to transform – because of the ways in which they become integrated into organizational processes involving these four mechanisms. I agree with the accusation that there is a lot of vagueness in the argument, and it is indeed very schematic, but at its best it is not contentless. It could be wrong.]**

2. A caricatured approach to the question of methodological individualism. This seems typical of a philosophical shoddiness that is unfortunately pretty common in the sociological literature. People seem to counterpose a view of society as composed of atomized individuals (which they call methodological individualism) to a view that gives society and social processes and structures some sort of independent existence outside of and apart from the human beings that constitute them and carry them out. Surely we don't need to reify social processes in order to understand that individuals are constituted by society in addition to constituting it. **[I think you are absolutely right about his caricaturing of individualism –also embodied in his anti-essentialism, which I find especially misleading given his claims that all durable inequality in all times and places involves these four mechanisms.]**

Methodological individualism hardly requires that we ignore social interactions, networks, etc. I don't know why Tilly presents it the way he does.

It reminds me exactly of similar stupid "debates" about reductionism in natural science.

3. A poor treatment of ideology and intentionality. For instance, Tilly nicely points out the way that internal structures (within organizations) tend to replicate external structures (race and gender being his obvious examples). He doesn't go on to point out the equally important way that that internal structuration then reacts back to reinforce external structures (if women consistently get jobs as secretaries instead of executives, this helps to

reinforce broad views regarding the abilities of women, etc.). Perhaps he leaves this out because, as Wright says, his approach is very strongly Marxist.

4. Not so much a problem as an observation. This is not really about class. Class as a dynamic force, a motor of social evolution, has been gradually leaching out of the readings until, in Tilly, it is entirely eliminated. **[It will come back with Mann next week.]**

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## 11. Jorge Sola

Tilly's book is very ambitious, but at the same time, he recognizes that his work is just "a provisional synthesizer of so vast a phenomenon as durable inequality" (40). That is the reason why I am not sure if some criticisms are proper, insofar as he himself could accept such criticisms by saying that his book is only the first step in the analysis of inequalities from a relational point of view. Sometimes, nevertheless, it seems to me that so many instances hide a clear formulation of his substantives proposal. (Anyway, this book has been without doubt the most difficult to read for me, therefore I couldn't read as carefully as I would have wanted).

Tilly tries to build "a bridge from Max Weber to Karl Marx" and is not committed to one specific tradition or general framework of history or capitalist society. Thus, what might be termed his "organizational materialism" is a mix of different theoretical tools. The only thing that I would suggest is that we can do the same with his work, take only some of its parts –namely, the four recurrent casual mechanisms– but not other ones, such as the hidden functionalism pointed out by Erik Wright. If it was the case, and I think it is, these casual mechanisms could make other theoretical frameworks richer and more complex. I am thinking of Wright's Neomarxist schemas, especially of class formation and class struggle topics. Such a framework is very careful in the contradictory positions' analysis insofar as it is focused above all on class structure, but is less thoughtful with organizations which mediate the relations of this structure, like parties and unions. One could suppose in principle that both unions and left parties will defend the working class's interests (whatever they are), but if we took the mechanisms elaborated by Tilly, perhaps we would be more able to see the ambivalent role of such organizations. For instance, the unions' bureaucracies could take advantage of the "opportunity hoarding" at the working class's expense (or at least, at expense of some kind of workers) to gain resources for the organization, whose main goal would be to survive and be stronger. In the same sense, the leftish parties (whether social-democrats or communist) would reproduce, throughout the "emulation", the same non-democratic and hierarchical manner of organizing themselves (the famous "oligarchy iron law"), making non-possible the accountability of their policies by the working class which support them. **[When you describe unions as engaged in "opportunity hoarding" you seem to be mainly concerned with the ways in which union bureaucrats hoard opportunities and this undermines the goals of their members. When Tilly talks about opportunity hoarding I think he had more in mind the ways in which highly skilled workers would use unions or guilds or other associations to create closure in the market –**

**limit access to these kinds of jobs for outsiders – and thus hoard opportunities for the union members. You are right, of course, that Union bosses and party headers to engage in various kinds of hierarchical and hoarding practices, and this can contradict the interests of the broader membership, but I think Tilly would regard this as a second-order phenomenon in this context.]**

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## 12. Elizabeth Wrigley-Field

[Taking Erik's advice of writing the Tilly response before doing the supplementary readings...]

It's a little hard for me to know what to say or ask about Tilly. I found reading the book to be very fun, but a lot of the things that were the most interesting to me also seemed like digressions or side points from the main argument – or if not digressions, then I wasn't always sure what their significance was supposed to be. Similarly, I often found myself very much agreeing with Tilly's criticisms of other theories and his general impulse to look at inequality in relational, not individual, terms – but I also found myself often unsure about what, exactly, he was proposing as an alternative. (I couldn't help but feel while I was reading that only Tilly could have written this book – that if it weren't for the sense that this guy's a genius, then rather than a grand synthesis of many ideas, it would just seem scattered. Maybe that's unfair, since he does, repeatedly, bullet-point his specific points and predictions.)

An example is one of the main points I hope we'll discuss in class, Tilly's argument about gender. On the one hand, I really liked the way he positioned his theory in relation to the literature on gender discrimination in the workplace. I think it's a very important point that most inequality is at the level of segregation within and differential treatment across *jobs*, not different treatment of individuals/genders within jobs; and that approaches that see inequality only on an individual level as normatively suspect will therefore miss the point. (I have often been frustrated by this same issue in discussions of the “Berkeley graduate school” case of Simpson's Paradox, which comes up a fair amount in statistics/causation discussions. The example is that women are less likely to be accepted to Berkeley grad school than men, but when you look department-by-department, they're just as likely to be accepted; the explanation is, they apply to departments that are harder to get into. The way the story is told, this is supposed to exonerate Berkeley, but I'm not convinced; it's entirely possible, I think, that “feminized” departments have a harder time getting sufficient faculty lines, student funding, etc for the number of students who want to attend because they are considered “less important.”) **[That is a very suggestive point about compositional effects around gender – that could be a nice research project for someone.]**

So, good for Tilly on that point. I particularly liked how he explained, in the conclusion, what this would mean in practice about how to research inequality: instead of taking the residual difference after controlling for everything you can think of and saying “that's discrimination,” you should treat discrimination as “the portion of inequality that corresponds to locally relevant categories.”

However, I had a lot of trouble understanding what Tilly's alternative view of what's going on with gender at work actually *is*. It seemed to me like *maybe* the



argument is: Exploitation, rather than the Marxist sense of being paid *less than the value of what you add*, is the subtly different: being paid *less in relation to what you add than somebody else is paid*. **[I don't think this is what Tilly means by exploitation. He explicitly defines exploitation as not receiving "the full value added from effort" which is not a claim about receiving less value added from effort than someone else.]** That, I think, means that on Tilly's view, men as a group generally exploit women as a group. This either occurs in the first place, or is exacerbated (I'm not sure which), because men tend to relate to women in the workplace according to gendered scripts that they import from other situations, leading to gendered relations in the workplace that lead to segregation.

So, questions:

1. Is that an accurate description? **[I don't think you have this quite right. Tilly is not trying to explain how men exploit women as such; he is trying to explain how the categorical inequalities between men and women are melded with the forms of organization-based inequality in order to create a more efficient, more robust structure of durable inequality. The linkage of gender to managerial hierarchy makes hierarchy more stable; the linkage or race to capitalist exploitation makes capitalist exploitation more stable with lower transaction costs, etc., and makes skilled worker opportunity hoarding more stable, etc. But this does not mean that whites exploit blacks as categories.]**
2. I'm really not clear on why the segregation is supposed to arise. **[Tilly is less concerned with how things "arise" than how they function]**
3. Is there a class distinction made among "men" here at all? At times, Tilly sounds like he's saying the "authorities" want to prevent the use of gendered scripts (some of the military examples); other times, he sounds like he's attributing segregation to the firms.

Maybe a clearer way to ask my questions would be: on the bottom of the first paragraph on p. 135, Tilly summarizes his argument about gender. It starts from firms "installing" categorical boundaries and "channeling" women into the worse locations. Why do they do this? **[efficiency; lowers transaction costs; makes the hierarchical structure more stable as a result; etc.]** And what is actually different about Tilly's answer, compared to the views he is criticizing – not only that inequality is due to individual discrimination on the level of individuals in hiring, but also that it is due to individual discrimination on the level of jobs?

### 13. Hsing-Mei Pan

It seems to me Charles Tilly intends to catch and explain the unequal social relations among people in contemporary society from the angle of structuralism. He presents the possible forms of social relations and social ties involved in social life and thinks they are the source of durably categorical inequality in gender, race, ethnicity, class, and so on. According to him, categorical inequality (male/female, whites/blacks, superiors/ inferiors, etc.) has been produced based on the principle of exclusion and inclusion (the principle of excluding and including other people) and has been maintained through four

mechanisms, exploitation, opportunity hoarding, emulation, and adaptation. On the other hand, he argues that people in different categories often distinguish each other through adopting symbolic forms (stigmata, badges) that constitute the social boundaries of different categories. Although Charles Tilly combines the two approaches to describe possibly unequal social relations among people, it seems that he does not really discuss why and how these opposite paired categories appear and exist. Is it the concepts of classification of people that constitute the existence of these opposite paired categories and unequal relations? **[I agree that Tilly does not have much to say about how these categories arise, if by that you mean their original origins. I think he would say this is highly variable and contingent, except perhaps for gender which does seem rooted in biological reproduction in one way or another. For him the issue is not where they come from, but how they function and are used to stabilize structures of inequality, and this happens because of the ways they are linked to organizations within which resources are controlled and deployed. It is only when these binary categories get linked to such organizational processes that they assume the form of durable inequalities, and only then that these symbolic classification get any real power.]** Or is it the existing social structures that are the sources of these paired categories and unequal relations? It seems to me Charles Tilly does not discuss the argument between structuralists and symbolists on the issue. What is the position of Charles Tilly?

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#### 14. Ann Pikus

This point is probably just venting but I am quite confused by why Tilly seems to believe he is the first to argue that the perpetuation of inequality in society is better explained by structural forces than individual differences. Although obviously some people argue all inequality can be attributed to individual differences (or group superiority/inferiority), the view that structural forces are largely determinative of life chances and outcomes seems quite pervasive among sociologists and social activists.

While I understand Tilly's goal is to explain how inequalities are perpetuated and that his discussion is focused on categories, not individuals, I'm wondering if his framework might be overly deterministic. If categories are as fixed and pervasive as Tilly suggests, how can individual improvements in life chances (i.e. second-generation immigrant being first in her family to attend college) ever occur? While I agree social structures are more determinative in the aggregate, Tilly seems to suggest an individual has no power to affect their life chances or outcomes and I am not sure I agree with that. **[I think his argument would not be that individuals cannot affect their own life chances, but rather that they cannot in general affect the pattern of durable inequality itself. Durable inequality can allow for some individuals to move from one position to another, but the overall configuration will change only when the organizational processes change – he argues. This could in some cases be the cumulative effect over an extended period of individual actions – such as individual women entering the labor force and this eroding (but not really destroying) the gender component of durable inequality over a period of several decades.]**

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## 15. Adrienne Pagac

Durable Inequality by Charles Tilly aims to provide an explanation of the continuity of *categorical* inequality (particularly in advanced capitalist societies). A brief and very simplistic summary: durable inequalities are created when one group controls the access to valuable resources and employ 'categorical differences' to structure the relations to those resources. Using a combination of Marxian and Weberian elements, Tilly suggests there are two causal mechanisms for durable inequality: exploitation (Marxian) and opportunity hoarding (Weberian). These two mechanisms and their effects are supported and extended by an additional two mechanisms, emulation and adaptation. The unit of analysis that seems to underlie the advantages of some (and the disadvantages of others) is the categorical pair. But what help does the use of dichotomies provide in understanding inequality, especially when reality is not "black and white"?

As far as I understand, Tilly does acknowledge the presence and employ of many categorical pairs when inequality is constructed, but I am not certain which categorical pair is given primacy as the 'determining' factor for the unequal outcome. If the black/white and Christian/Muslim pairs are 'active, which, according to Tilly, would influence/determine the outcome/characteristics of that inequality? It seems to me that within relations between individuals, groups, etc., wherein multiple categorical differences exist and individuals/groups fit into "A or not-A", then the outcome would be "overdetermined" (to borrow an idea from Resnick and Wolff) and not ascribable to one particular difference.