

# *Elites*

## *Ethnographic Issues*

*George E. Marcus*

*Editor*

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GEORGE E. MARCUS

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—GEORGE E. MARCUS





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**ELITES:**  
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# PART I

## Introduction

In the social sciences, *elite* has remained a flexible cover term that refers to the rich, powerful, and privileged in any society, past or present, Western or non-Western. The School of American Research seminar that provided the basis for this volume was convened to reflect upon past results and explore future directions in the investigation of elite groups by anthropologists. A major aim was to examine the relationships—actual and potential—between ethnography and the general development of elites as Western social thought.<sup>1</sup> The seminar was further stimulated by the increasing concern among anthropologists for a systematic ethnographic literature on elites in the bureaucratic processes of advanced capitalist societies (see Nader 1969) and in the context of the political economy of development (see Schneider, Schneider, and Hansen 1972; Hansen 1977).

Major national traumas over the past two decades of American history have forcefully directed public attention to the dynamic role of elite power and influence in shaping modern societies, and it is thus particularly appropriate for a volume to appear that considers the distinctive contribution that anthropology can make to elite studies

through ethnographic research. Eisenhower's cryptic farewell warning about the role of an elite in the form of a military-industrial complex has resounded through the transitions of national leadership since Kennedy. The 1963 assassination firmly planted in the public mind speculation about and interest in conspiracies at the highest levels of power; the Vietnam debacle tellingly raised the subject of elite accountability; Watergate exposed to the public, in unprecedented detail, an intimate view of elite in-fighting; the economic disorder of the 1970s reinforced lack of confidence in collective national leadership served by an establishment; the brief Carter presidency introduced unsuccessfully an explicitly antielitist flavor to national leadership; and now the Reagan presidency has formed policies that apparently nurture the reemergence of dormant elitist tendencies in American political ideas. The cumulative effect of these successive turbulent events in national leadership has been to focus attention on the often decisive role of organized elite activities on a society's affairs. Yet what an elite is as a subculture in a mass liberal society such as America, what its practices, orienting ideas, and intentions are, and in what sense it can be held responsible for events remain largely mysterious to both social scientists and a lay public who are deeply impressed nonetheless by the notion that elite cultures are more than a figment of the imagination. The mystery is less a consequence of existing gaps in widely disseminated knowledge of elites than of inadequacies in the concepts and methods developed by those social scientists who have studied them.

One purpose of this volume is to provide a needed critique of the treatment accorded elites as subjects by recent Western social thought. Summaries of the substantive content of elite theory and research have been elided from this critique, since the claims of elite theory and the achievements of elite research have been repeatedly treated elsewhere (see Chapter 1 for references). This critical review of elite research clears the way for a discussion of ideas that arose during the seminar about how a more ambitious ethnographic program of research on elites in complex societies might be oriented. The chapters that introduce the specific studies of this volume may seem unduly programmatic, but what was learned in discussing the styles of research on elites, evident in the papers presented by seminar participants, is that while an ethnographic approach is sorely needed in order to enrich the existing sociological literature on elites, very little of the reflective

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or critical spadework has been done, at least in print, to initiate such an approach. This volume, then, seeks to contribute some of the thinking that is needed to establish grounds for further work by social anthropologists on elites.

As it turned out, all our cases were embedded in complex societies variously related to the historic Western European development of polity and economy, which evolved from the sixteenth century (see Wallerstein 1974) and later spread as a model of societal organization, superimposed upon traditional orders throughout the world in successive periods of colonialism and posttraditional modernity. While some participants (e.g. the Rudolphs, Cohen, and Brown) were concerned with encapsulated sociopolitical structures (and elite organizations) within this framework, all participants were concerned either with elites in societies and regions on the historic peripheries of the expansion of the nation-state model of societal organization, or with subjects situated within contemporary Euro-American societies.

Studies of counter-elites or elites within protest movements are underrepresented in this volume (although such elites were addressed in the papers of Greenhouse, Cohen, and Khare, and in the seminar discussions generally). Adequate consideration of the important historic relationships between elite groups who are “in” and those who are “out” is also lacking, and we are mainly concerned with elite cultures as internally constituted, their conventional channels of recruitment, and long-term trends of elite reproduction and decline, rather than with revolutionary change.

Consequently, the following introductory chapters suggest an integration of the seminar papers, not by their substantive contents (although this would be possible for a number of the papers, especially those that consider kin-based elite organization), but by the current styles of elite research in social anthropology, which they exemplify. This choice of organization reflects accurately the broad concern with concepts and methods that underlay seminar discussions of specific case studies, most of which were not themselves pitched at such a metatheoretical level. In stimulating discussion, the papers were each as interesting for what they failed to do as for what they accomplished.

The idea for this seminar originated during the course of my reading the anthropological literature on elites in preparation for fieldwork among Polynesian aristocrats, and then, a few years later, among Texas business dynasties. Particularly in this later research, I was impressed



with the freshness of an ethnographic approach to a topic that has been treated by political scientists, sociologists, and historians. I appreciated the opportunity elite research offers social anthropologists interested in complex societies, who would like to gain a perspective on the workings of society at a macro level by researching the particulars of a small group of subjects. In inviting participants I selected a mix of scholars, some explicitly concerned with elite research; some who had worked in fields such as political economy and political anthropology, where elite analysis has been considered; and some who would be addressing the significance of elites in their research for the first time. From the diversity of the cases has come a fairly complete overview of styles of elite research being done in contemporary anthropology (see Chapter 2).

Part I is a broadly conceived introduction to the seminar papers, intended to reflect issues raised in the discussions but not fully treated in the papers, as well as to review the state of anthropological concern with elites. Chapter 1 examines the anatomy of the elite concept and pursues its ramifications as a kind of social theory and research tradition in Western social science. Chapter 2 catalogues the variety of past ethnographic studies in which elite groups have been the object of analysis. Chapter 3 elaborates the principal theme that arose from seminar discussions—the relationship of private elite organizations to the manifest institutional orders of the nation-state with which they are involved. Part II of this volume includes revised versions of eight of the papers that served as vehicles for the wide-ranging discussions of the seminar.

## NOTES

1. Although revised versions of eight of the seminar papers are published in this volume, there were ten participants in the seminar: F. G. Bailey on university administrators; Donald E. Brown on elite organization in the sultanate of Brunei; Ronald Cohen on the Bura intellectuals of Nigeria; Carol J. Greenhouse on Baptist and business elites in an American suburb; Edward C. Hansen on elites in Catalonia; R. S. Khare on an untouchable elite, the Lucknow Chamars; George E. Marcus on dynastic families in Texas; Lloyd I. Rudolph on state elites in princely India; and Jane and Peter T. Schneider on a Sicilian ruling elite.

# 1

## “Elite” as a Concept, Theory, and Research Tradition

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### THE CONCEPT

*Elite* is a word that we use with facility in everyday discourse despite the considerable ambiguity surrounding it. In Wittgenstein’s terms, it has the peculiar status of an “odd-job” word. Clear in what it signifies, but ambiguous as to its precise referents, the concept of elite in general usage has a certain force; it locates agency in social events by evoking the image of a ruling, controlling few, while being intractably vague. In everyday use, a reference to elites suggests an image of inequality and the wielding of power in interpersonal relations while remaining moot about whether an elite is an empirically more or less self-reproducing fixture of social organization. The concept points to certain essential features of society, the more explicit expression of which would be ideologically awkward in Western (or at least Anglo-American) society. Only when *elite* is elaborated as an interest of social theory and research, which address as their purpose the empirical referents of the concept, does the inherent vagueness of the concept become a major difficulty.

An explanation for this felicitous imprecision in the routine use of the concept of elite must be historically grounded. In his compendium *Keywords* (1976: 96–98), Raymond Williams makes an important connection between historic changes in the use of the word *elite* and the transformation of the ancien régime social orders of Europe into mass societies and liberal nation-states. Before the nineteenth century, the word had both restricted meanings and limited everyday use. *Elite* literally meant the elect—persons formally chosen in some social process—and, particularly in a theological context, those chosen by God. It also referred to the best or choicest things, as well as to persons. However, the abundance of explicit categories of rank, which affirmed in language a premise of inequality inherent in feudal society, overshadowed the use of the word in discourse.

In nineteenth-century Europe, the gradual decline and disappearance of the older, varied distinctions of rank marked an ideological uneasiness about any kind of fixed inequality, especially if it was identifiable as residing in actual, enduring groups of powerful and privileged individuals. In social thought a fundamental ambiguity arose about where and by whom superordinate authority ought to be exercised. Yet, to contemporary observers, concentrations of power, wealth, and elevated status were no less evident as phenomena of the new orders just because the structural nature of these concentrations was difficult to perceive and discuss. General uncertainty persisted in nineteenth-century Europe and America about how to refer to these unquestionably permanent features of society, which had become, in effect, ideological unmentionables.

During this period, *elite* came into much wider usage, along with the concept of class and a collection of terms used to identify impersonal institutions (especially the state, bureaucracy, the economy, and the market). At different levels of abstraction, these concepts stood for sources of causal agency behind events in the new orders and, more important, they enabled those who spoke about society to continue to refer to evident inequalities while remaining vague about their precise empirical status. Whole bodies of social theory and research were devoted to sorting out the ontological status of the referents of each of these concepts.

What distinguishes *elite* from such alternative concepts as class and the state is that it focuses one's imagery at a much lower level of abstraction than do the latter terms. It evokes the image of specifiable

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groups of persons rather than impersonal entities such as formal organizations and mass collectivities. Furthermore, the concept of elite carries with it the notion that such groups are the major source of change within relevant levels of social organization—local, regional, societal, and international; they are the force behind institutional processes in which others—the masses, nonelites—participate with them. The concept suggests that the organization of these powerful groups can be mapped and described. This is unlike alternative concepts of agency such as a class or the state, which are useful precisely to the extent that they remain empirically unelaborated entities. An enduring problem in elite research has been the focus, to the exclusion of other issues, upon the delineation of the empirical status of an elusive concept. Also, because the concept of elite represents, more than class or institutional agency, a very sensitive challenge to the notion that entrenched inequality in a highly visible, personal form did not, or should not, develop in liberal social orders, it is not surprising that the narrowly empirical concerns of elite research with the form and degree of elite organization have been inextricably tied to more general radical and conservative critiques of mass, liberal society. In fact, the inherent normative dimensions of elite research have often overtaken its modest, narrowly empirical goals.

In casual English usage as a lay and social science concept, *elite* is a term of reference, rather than self-reference, and at base, it suggests some degree of organization among a category or group of persons. The term may sometimes designate individuals—leaders, heroes, or great men—but its use implies that such individuals are distinguished members of *an elite*. The major emphasis of elite theory and research has not been on the biographical details of lives of the elite but rather on the empirical elaboration of the organization inherent in the concept.

Few social scientists have viewed themselves as members of the elites they studied. In researching elites, we have been outsiders viewing a culture that was almost as distinct from our own, and as difficult to comprehend, as the cultures of the tribal subjects anthropologists have traditionally studied. The “otherness” characteristic in the use of the concept derives from its historic function in social discourse—to point to ambiguously constituted structures of enduring power and inequality in liberal social orders. The fact that elites are always observed from an outsider’s perspective has also carried over to the development of

the concept of the elite as a theory and research tradition; the schematics of elite organization and its place in larger system frameworks have been much more commonly addressed than its internal culture and practices. This bias of perspective may impede the development of an ethnographic view, which must link its traditional focus on subjective culture and small group process to the preponderant but valuable body of work on elite structures and functions conceived externally as part of larger systems.

*Elite* as a casual term of reference serves to evoke certain resonant images, free from precise empirical or theoretical implications. These images are shaped by three broad qualities of elites: agency, exclusivity, and some form of definitive relationship of elites with their social environments, conceived either as corporate institutional orders or as other persons. Only when subjected to empirical investigation do these qualities as variables take on systematic meanings.

As causal agents behind events, elites represent a way of conceiving power in society and attributing responsibility to persons rather than to impersonal processes. The image is of actors who cooperate and make decisions which bring about effects, shaping events for others. In the everyday use of the concept, there is no need to elaborate on how elites do this, which is the burden of elite theory and research. Rather, elites merely stand for an image of personalized, phantomlike agency in complex societies, where corporate entities or institutions, instead of elites, are often conceived as the most immediate and concrete agents in daily life.

Among the middle classes of mass liberal societies, it is precisely in situations of perceived system breakdown, short of collapse, that the imagery of elites replaces on a wide scale that of impersonal institutional entities as agents. By definition, elites are intimately associated with the working of institutions since their informal organization evolves along with or in opposition to formal organization in a complex society. A perception of imminent collapse might evoke images of class conflict on a societal scale, but crisis as a more routinely expectable occurrence interrupts institutional process and stimulates a search for agency in other terms. In these circumstances, elites, as the human counterparts of impersonal institutional authority, become a popular image of agency.

The widespread evocation among Americans of invisible power brokerage and conspiracy (often the particular form in which elites are

evoked) is well illustrated by reactions to the gasoline shortage during the summer of 1979 and by domestic confusions about who runs Iran in the wake of the revolution and hostage seizure of 1979–80. In both cases, the failure of institutional processes generated an image of power and responsibility that has a blurred focus on unknown individuals able to manipulate events (in one case, the corporate elite of the oil industry, and in the other, the Iranian religious and revolutionary elite). It is not surprising that when evoked, elite agency is usually viewed pejoratively in light of the noted historic sensitivity in liberal societies to the mere attribution of societal agency in personalized terms. Obviously in such crises, the popular evocation of elites serves to make understandable situations that would otherwise seem incomprehensible. Although systematic investigation does not always reveal evidence of conspiracy by elites in such cases, the popular view is often well formed. And even when evidence of elite agency is lacking, the members of modern societies seem to find reassurance in being able to blame real and identifiable persons for what goes wrong; at least somebody is responsible for the breakdown of normally self-sustaining systems and institutions.

The more dispassionate use of *elite* as a casual term in social science discourse is not unlike its popular use. A speaker who uses the term chooses to locate agency in the personalized realm of small-group activity. Likewise, even in this discourse, elites are perceived to act in conspiracy—to achieve the hidden domination of the many by the few—regardless of the apparent neutrality of the term as used to identify a group of persons with causal agency. It is the task of explicit elite theory and research to elaborate the view of elites as prime movers, and to account for their influence in terms of empirical phenomena such as the distribution of power and authority, the processes of decision making, and the control of issues brought to public attention in a particular society.

Exclusivity is a second quality associated with the elite concept. It often connotes superiority, but in essence denotes separation. The elite may be imagined as separated from others in either invisible, low-profile, or conspicuous, visible ways. However, even conspicuously exclusive elites, exposed to emulation or scorn, are commonly thought to act in a discrete backstage arena that is invisible to nonelites. In elite theory and research, the degree to which elites are exclusive is

determined by examining empirical phenomena such as recruitment, practices of boundary maintenance, and emblems of status that are embodied in elite life-styles.

Agency and exclusivity are closely joined in images of elites, but depending on the context of reference, one quality or the other may be stressed in the use of the concept. In discussions of politics, the agency quality of elites as prime movers is usually emphasized; in discussions of social mobility, stratification, wealth, and life-style, their exclusivity is emphasized.

Third, although it is possible to imagine a group whose members are an elite in their eyes alone,<sup>1</sup> it is much more common to think of elites in relational terms. Elites are imagined as groups in relation to other groups who are nonelites, or they are imagined as groups situated in a social system, in which they, as elites, dominate an institutional order. The former mode of conceiving the relational quality of elites is perhaps the most common and least problematic. In effect, elites are defined relative to a population of which they are clearly members. In narrowly defined groups, communities, or institutional contexts, elites may be easily marked off from others in everyday face-to-face relations. In this direct mode of relationship, elites are such because of their superior manifestation of personal qualities shared with non-elites that visibly signify their distinctiveness; there are no mediating institutions through which elites operate and which make them personally invisible and anonymous to a mass of nonelites whose lives they, nonetheless, affect.

It is more difficult to determine what relationships exist between elites and situated institutions. To talk of elites versus masses in state-organized complex societies may be to invoke a powerful, basic image, but this simple dichotomy does not adequately describe the indirect way elites relate to populations through institutional processes. One alternative is to imagine elites compartmentalized within a multitude of institutions, and within these institutional frames, to view elites in direct face-to-face relation to nonelites, as in any small-group context. From this viewpoint, there is no integrated societal elite organization, but only a loosely connected plurality of elite organizations, ringed by particular institutional environments. The other alternative is to imagine a coherent society-wide elite organization (the classic vision of a ruling class), which controls, through complex and largely hidden processes, the institutions that in turn organize the general population.

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Of these two images, the “pluralist” view has taken the former as corresponding to the real situation, while the “power elite” view has adopted the latter. Between these two views has been fought the pluralist-power elite debate that for so long dominated the Anglo-American elite research tradition.

It is sufficient here to point out that the contrasting of elites to specific people with whom they are in face-to-face relations, or to the masses, is perhaps the most common and vivid way of imagining the relational quality of elites in complex society, but it is also the least adequate for empirical investigation. Viewing elites in relation to the institutions that mediate between them and others is a more adequate imagery for a complex society. In empirical studies, unfortunately, it has also proved difficult to document these relationships, or to assess the extent of domination by an elite organization over the operations of complexly structured corporate bodies.

For the ethnographer, relating elites to corporate systems, rather than to specific people, requires the ability to define closely observed subjects as elites, not in relativistic terms which would be appropriate for small-scale societies, but in reference to the total larger system in which they are elites. Thus, selection of elites as ethnographic subjects presupposes considerable prior knowledge or guesswork about the nature of the larger system in which it is meaningful to label them as elites. (See Chapter 8, in which the Schneiders deal with this issue in terms of the changing conditions of local-level elite formation in Sicily.)

### THE THEORY

Although many historical and philosophical accounts have unself-consciously assumed the determinative social role of elites, the body of theory most explicitly linked to the elite concept was independently developed by the Italian scholars Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The major theorists of nineteenth-century industrial societies in Europe, such as Marx, Schumpeter (in his emphasis on the circulation of elite families), and Weber (particularly under his broader concept of status groups), had devoted marginal attention to elites. More than these others, Mannheim paid explicit attention to the role of elites in modern societies. If later research had followed his lead, it would have been more concerned with elite subculture, and particularly with the kinds



of mental culture—world views and outlooks—that differentiated elites from nonelites. Instead, elite research followed Pareto and Mosca, who made ruling groups, as prime movers, the focus of a social theory that reduced the dynamics of any social system to the behavior and activities of an organized elite.

Pareto and Mosca attempted to show that an elite perspective, in comparison to class or institutional perspectives, could better explain several issues of power and inequality in the evolution of modern, liberal society, and was thus a better way to discuss agency.

It was the task of their theoretical program to posit the place, organizational contours, and impact of elites within their social environments. Pareto and Mosca conformed in theory building to the outsider angle of vision which, as noted, has been implicit in the use of elite as a concept, and thus they tended to emphasize the structural form rather than the cultural substance of elite organization. Because their work has provided a basis for so much that has followed, subsequent research has given relatively little attention to the nature of cultural processes within elite organizations.

I will make no attempt to review Pareto's and Mosca's work; this is routinely done in the literature on elites (for good discussions of the Italian theories, see Meisel 1962; Bottomore 1964; and Hansen and Parrish, this volume). Instead, I will offer three extended comments on the historic context and concerns of elite theory.

(1) Just as changes in the way *elite* was used as an everyday word occurred in the wake of historic changes in European societies, so elite theory arose as an alternative way of conceiving the general workings of nineteenth-century European capitalist societies. In his later works, Marx conceived the sociological implications of capitalist economic processes in terms of the abstract social entities which they generated—classes. As Anthony Giddens has suggested (1973: 118), fixing his discussion at this level of abstraction left undeveloped in Marx's work a treatment of the connections between economic and political power. The theories of Pareto and Mosca can be seen as a critique of the Marxian perspective. As Giddens says (1973: 118–19):

The substance of this critique, in the writings of such as Pareto and Mosca, may be expressed as an attempt to transmute the Marxian concept of class, as founded in the relations of production, into an essentially *political* differentiation between those "who rule" and those who "are ruled"—a transmutation which was, indeed, in part made possible by Marx's failure to specify

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in a systematic fashion the modes whereby the economic hegemony of the capitalist class becomes “translated” into the political domination of the *ruling* class.

Seemingly, Pareto and Mosca reduced the level of abstraction in Marx to a more hard-headedly empirical, realist level. Whether in fact the concept of elite they introduced was any less theoretically abstract than the Marxian concept of class, or any easier to see in action, is beside the point; it had appeal as more graspable in human terms than the later work of Marx, which dealt with relations among systems rather than between persons. Furthermore, if Marx is seen as aligned with a particular antibourgeoisie position in European politics, then Pareto and Mosca’s alternative-as-critique to Marx can also be read as a political rebuttal to left-wing analyses of society and the political implications they contained. Elite theory was interpreted in this way (largely through the work of Robert Michels) in twentieth-century fascism, but it also later served critiques (through the work of C. Wright Mills) of the state and monopoly capitalism.

(2) In their emphasis on elites as rulers, Pareto and Mosca can be seen as heirs to a tradition in Italian political theory that had been well defined from the time of Machiavelli. It is not entirely surprising that this theory developed in Italy on the Mediterranean periphery of Europe, while theory emphasizing class and state formation in capitalist economies developed in the more industrialized societies to the north. It is perhaps no accident that these theorists who wrote in the midst of agrarian capitalism, where market expansion outpaced centralized state formation, should conceive a social theory which focused upon groups of powerful persons, based on landholding family factions and operating coherently across local, regional, and national institutions. To the north, where bureaucratization had apparently taken a much stronger hold on social organization, society’s workings could more easily be explained by the actions of institutional agents such as the state or of mass collectivities tied to primary institutions (classes formed by modes of production).

Thus, these alternative concepts for attributing agency in the evolving social orders of Europe reflect the differing conditions of historic change in the northern and southern parts of the continent. This historic connection also suggests that elite theory, generalized from the writings of Pareto, Mosca, and their successors, is more appropriate

for certain kinds of contemporary societies (e.g., the so-called developing societies) than for others.

(3) By introducing the theoretical centrality of elites, Pareto and Mosca immediately raised the question of the relation among classes, institutional orders, and elites in modern societies. By establishing the alternative, rather than complementary, nature of an elite focus in relation to a class focus, Pareto and Mosca, like Marx, failed to clarify how elites (grounded in ruling functions) and classes (grounded in market and productive processes) are related as concepts. Furthermore, they failed to specify how elites, which were collections of individuals, rather than corporate bodies, were related to corporate, institutional organizations such as states, firms, and bureaucracies. The nature of these relationships has remained ambiguous in efforts to produce a general theory of elites, and has not been resolved in a systematic way by subsequent elite research.

There are different analytical means to relate elites and classes, which exist on different levels of conceptual abstraction that need not conflict.<sup>2</sup> It is probably most useful to differentiate elite from class formation, not in the framework of macro-theory construction, but rather as the two enter into the formulation of middle-range theories developed to explain specific societies and particular historical conditions (see the papers by the Schneiders on the Sicilian *civile* in this volume).

It is clear from the classic social theories that elites operate more like institutions than like classes, and consequently, it seems imperative in the first instance to explain the relations between the organization and activities of elites and the workings of institutions, which they parallel.<sup>3</sup> These systematic connections between elites and institutional orders will be examined in Chapter 3.

In modern societies, elites are creatures of institutions in which they have defined functions, offices, or controlling interests, but in relation to institutions, they re-create a domain of personal relationships that extends across functional and official boundaries. Institutions seem to have a life of their own, and society can be explained wholly in terms of the working of formal organizations. But what if the behavior of the same organizations is attributed to the activities of their controlling elites in closed informal communities? The theoretical vision of modern society then is less a model of the workings of formal organizations than it is an image of the internal cultures of ruling groups and of the

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effects of their activities upon deceptively monolithic, automatic institutional processes in which or against which they operate.

The task of elite research has been to define the extent and composition of such elite communities, whose activities and interests interpenetrate the functions of institutions. It has not proved easy to describe elite organizations, whose activities are often indistinguishable from the activities of the institutions they dominate. Past efforts have very often led only to unending terminological disagreements and confusions, and in these elite research has long been mired.

### THE RESEARCH TRADITION

A pronounced interest in research on elites developed in Anglo-American social science following World War II. In its empirical concerns, this research was strongly influenced by the theories of Pareto and Mosca, and in taking as its major issue the question how, and to what degree, elites influenced social processes, it remained fixated on a question raised but unresolved by the ambiguous usage of the concept of the elite in nineteenth-century social discourse. This research was much concerned with the threat that the surge of authoritarian regimes and overt elitist doctrines as part of European fascism (with which classic elite theorists become associated) posed for democracy and political liberalism (see, in particular, Bachrach 1967 and Putnam 1973). It is not necessary here to review the many detailed discussions of this tradition (see, for example, Lasswell 1952; Keller 1963; Giddens 1974; and Putnam 1976), but only to point out those of its characteristics and limitations that are relevant to anthropological work.

Following the implicit guides for empirical investigation in the Italian theories, researchers sought to map the organization of largely political elites, whose members were identified by their leadership functions in institutions, and to study the effective, as opposed to the formally defined, power that members of elites exercised as leaders in their societies. As the work of G. William Domhoff, a prolific American elite researcher (1967, 1978, 1979) shows, the study of elites became synonymous with the study of power structures.

Owing to its underpinnings in political ideology and its narrow empirical focus, elite research stalled on debates concerning the structure of elite organization in mass liberal societies. Elite studies became a kind of social architecture, concerned with modeling the structure

of elite relationships in modern society. Of major interest were such variables as the degree and form of elite integration, patterns of recruitment to elite positions (the opportunities for social mobility across the boundaries of elite groups, the social backgrounds of elite members, and the degree of stability in the membership of elites), and the extent to which elites controlled a variety of constituencies and institutions. In America, this research sought above all to prove or disprove the existence of a coherent, society-wide organization of interlocking elites (as opposed to congeries of isolated specialized elites). The empirical research was pursued most energetically by those (like C. Wright Mills, G. William Domhoff, and Ferdinand Lundberg) who claimed the existence of a tight-knit, societal organization of elites. These theorists and researchers of power elites were challenged by the so-called pluralists (such as Robert A. Dahl, Nelson W. Polsby, and Daniel Bell), who were their sharp critics but who did not themselves undertake independently to formulate elite theory or to engage in elite research (because they questioned the existence or efficacy of elites).<sup>4</sup>

This debate was unresolvable precisely because the empirical object was elusive and beyond the capacity of a single researcher or even a group of them to treat definitively. The aim of power elite researchers was to prove extensively that elites were significant on a societal scale. Their principal method was to measure the features of elite organization. Their "big picture" strategy was to show how expansive and interconnected was the societal organization of elites, and they did not closely examine internal features of elite subcultures. While, in other contexts of research, some excellent accounts of elite subculture have been produced,<sup>5</sup> the family relations, world views, and praxis (or tacit "rules of the game") in the activities that define groups as elite have not been systematically treated by those who have studied American elites. Lack of attention to the internal subcultures of elites has not been due so much to the practical inaccessibility of these subcultures to researchers (this *is* a problem, but not an insurmountable one), as to the particular ideological and historical roots from which the elite research tradition has grown.

Vagueness about how an elite should be defined, while possibly functional in casual discourse, has led to terminological confusions among researchers about the meanings of other concepts, such as power elite and ruling class, used to elaborate notions of elite organization. In mass societies with differentiated institutional orders, manifestations

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of elite organization have a phantom quality which is a perpetual obstacle in a field of research that seeks to grasp the structure of this organization. Also, elite research has tended to remain self-contained and analytically autonomous—features which are consistent with the historically alternative stance elite theory has taken as a macro theory. As did elite theorists before them, elite researchers have emphasized the external effects of elite organization as visible from an outsider's perspective. Much of elite research has been based on the presupposition that we already know what elites are about, and that priority attention should be given to their social impact. Finally, because of the ideological ramifications of elite theory, attempts to determine whether elites were integrated into a society-wide network were bound to be entangled inseparably with, and made suspect by, normative statements about the desirability of a strong elite presence in modern liberal societies.

Anthony Giddens (1974: 1–22) has noted that the pluralism–power elite debate is, under contemporary conditions, moot; in advanced capitalist societies, some version of the pluralist position—that leadership is exercised by amorphous and differentiated groups, rather than by a monolithic societal organization—has gained acceptance by most social scientists. Still, how far what might once have been more integrated elite organizations have decomposed in contemporary society remains uncertain, and is still to be dealt with by elite researchers.

To study elite organization in advanced capitalist societies effectively, a revised strategy seems necessary—one that develops differing models of elite organization appropriate to distinct political and institutional units of analysis. The object then is to see in what respects varying kinds of localized elite organizations are interrelated. Rather than assuming the existence of a tightly knit societal elite organization, it seems more appropriate to assume only a complex intertwining of elite organizations of varying character that crosscut institutional and regional boundaries.

Although the study of elites has been closely associated with the study of power, the conception of power employed in these studies has been that of the social scientist rather than that of the elite subject. It is thus not surprising that, as Giddens notes, the forms and degrees of effective elite power have not been as well addressed as has the exercise of formal or obvious power derived from the occupation of institutional roles. If all elite activity involves in some sense the exercise of power,

then any formal or general concept of power employed by the analyst is too gross to capture the myriad subtle ways elites exercise power over others even when they do not perceive themselves as doing so. In this regard, elite research has also erred in treating all elites, including intellectuals and the clergy, as if they were political elites—as if, in fact, they conceived their activities as an exercise of power.

Finally, Giddens discusses how a domain or field of elite organization might be conceived in a society where there is no easily recognizable upper class from which individuals are exclusively recruited to positions of institutional leadership. Even where leadership groups lack an apparent class base in a population, an elite culture grows from the prolonged practice of elite functions. Likewise, there develops a pool, field, or domain of players and potential players, which may include in varying participatory roles great numbers of persons or families, but which is not a social class in any conventional sense. Such elite social domains become the clustering fringe and source of recruitment for controlling positions in formal organizations. Thus, elites need not be direct participants in institutions, but they must be within the field of relationships of those who are. For example, the hazily perceived American Establishment is a category in common usage which labels a domain of elites who are conceived to have primarily behind-the-scenes relationships to formal positions of leadership.

Although some of the members of any elite organization are known to its public, it is probably the less-visible members who are most important to elite research, because they, the marginally important or retired members, are most accessible as informants, and from these individuals it is easiest to obtain direct views of elite praxis and culture. From the vantage point of a fringe position, an ethnographer can learn what knowledge is possessed by elites and how this knowledge is distributed among them; how relationships are conceived and conventionalized; what the units of operation—families, firms, communities, clubs—are among the elite; and most important for traditional elite research, what the rough boundaries of particular elite groups are in relation to other elite organizations and institutional complexes.

An interesting implication of the critique offered here is that an elite perspective is more useful in analyzing certain kinds of societies than others. In anthropology, a focus on elites has come far more “naturally” to ethnographers in cultures with explicit hierarchical orders (e.g.,

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India and African kingdoms). Historically, a focus on elites is most obvious in literature dealing with societies where state or class formation is weak, leaving elites a clearer factor of agency: this heavy emphasis upon elites is evident in Latin American studies, which have found the concept of oligarchy especially useful, and in studies of Mediterranean Europe. In Anglo-American research, the power elite position may have provided a valid interpretation of United States society during the long period of family capitalism (see, for example, Lundberg's first book on elite families [1937]), but in the decades after World War II, it became a much more difficult position to describe and defend (see Mills 1956, and, especially, Lundberg's later work [1968]).

Ethnographic research on elites is facilitated if elite groups are composed of family-based factions rather than diffuse networks or associations of individuals not otherwise rooted in a basic organizational element of social structure. Family-based elite organization seems to be more salient in certain stages of the historic political and economic development of modern societies than in others. It is thus probably no accident that in recent times, an increasing interest among Western political scientists in elite theories was tied to the peaking of their broader interests in the development of Third World nation-states during the 1950s and 1960s. One need not argue that the non-Western world is recapitulating Western historic experience to claim that wherever the penetration of Western political and economic models is weak or limited, focus upon elites, and specifically elite families, is a particularly appropriate level of research orientation.<sup>6</sup> Conversely, it is probably true that in advanced capitalist societies, the case for an elite focus as a macro-theoretical framework is much more difficult to support empirically, as the conceptual and methodological limitations of the Anglo-American research tradition have demonstrated.

Both despite and because of its limitations, the elite research tradition offers valuable lessons for ethnographers. The power elite-pluralist debate stalled largely because power elitists and pluralists held different views about what constituted the activities of elite domination, views that on both sides were inadequate. As a result, the established conventions of elite research fail to provide a clear starting point for more moderately conceived and intensive programs of ethnographic research on elite organizations. Before such elite research is undertaken two major issues must be settled: how are the boundaries of elites to be



determined, and by what procedures is the structure of the total social system—of which elites are one part—to be described? Furthermore, the reductionist strain in elite research—setting an elite perspective as a more fundamental alternative, rather than as a complement, to class and institutional levels of analysis—ought to warn ethnographers not only to define their subjects in a societal context of elite organizations, but also to explain elite activities in relation to societal processes that can be best understood at other levels of conceptual abstraction. In perspective, the elite research tradition can be seen as one important attempt to provide holistic analyses of complex societies from a focus on small-group processes. Thus, a review of its flaws and successes is an essential background for any ethnographic research in complex societies, which shares with this tradition a similar putative concern with interpersonal relations.

#### ELITES AND ELITISM: THE NORMATIVE DIMENSION

Research that has described forms of elite organization and power has been marked by ambivalence about what ought to be the role of elites. Normative judgments about elites manifest themselves both in researchers' statements about the aims of their research and in discussions stimulated among readers of their empirical work. When research makes normative judgments about the societal effects of elite activities, as in the work of C. Wright Mills, an ideological discussion of such research is an expectable response, but the tradition of polemic that has characterized elite theory and research makes any contribution liable to be received and placed in a discussion about the desirability of inequality and unequal exercise of authority in Western liberal societies.

In routine social scientific discourse within Western societies, elites are always suspected of conspiracy against the public good; social scientists, like the American public, are most likely to attribute causation and responsibility to elites when institutional breakdown is threatened. A distinction between descriptions of elites and a doctrine of elitism has often been blurred in late twentieth-century Western societies. Like the term *elite*, *elitism* (or *elitist*) is a label usually applied to other persons (or to ideas or policies) rather than a term of self-reference. Elitist doctrines bring the normative dimensions of the elite concept

to the fore and stimulate a polarizing, polemical style of discourse. Whether elitists conceive elite organization to be pluralist or cohesive, they affirm that the best (by criteria of heredity, talent, or culture) should rule society and determine its tastes, fashions, policies, and the distribution of social benefits. Correspondingly, such a position is received negatively in liberal society, and *elitism* is commonly a pejorative term of reference. Thus, the charge of elitism assaults those who approve, or appear to be affirming, any legitimate role of elites in society.

While the charge of elitism merely exaggerates and makes explicit the normative implications of studies of elites, it only furthers the ambiguities about how to evaluate elite research in light of its mixed normative-empirical aims. It is certainly true that to some degree all forms of social inquiry involve a blurring of distinctions between empirical and normative claims. Yet, my argument here is that because of its intellectual history, elite research, more than other sociological research, has labored in a context of strong ideological reaction.

This polemical atmosphere, where elite researchers are likely to be tagged as either elitist or antielitist, creates special problems for ethnographers—if not for them personally, then for how their work is received. Normally anthropologists are empathetic with their subjects and become increasingly so the longer they are involved with them. However, as members of Western liberal society, ethnographers of elites may have difficulty in developing such a natural working empathy, especially if they are studying elites in their home societies. Even if empathy does not become a personal problem for the ethnographer of elites, and he produces work in which normative issues appear to be moot, the reactions of readers are nonetheless just as likely to be normatively based, since elite research of any kind has so routinely been received in an ideological atmosphere. Working empathy for one's subjects can be misconstrued as ideological sympathy; ideological distancing from one's subjects, to the point of disapproval, is a difficult condition of work in an ethnographic style of research (and may be one reason why there are so few ethnographies of elites); and ambivalence or silence in judgment on subjects makes the ethnographer's research equally vulnerable to a charge of elitism, or conversely to its use in a polemical condemnation of elites.

Although it is worth pointing out how the ideological atmosphere surrounding elite research may affect ethnographic work, there is no

practical way to remove elite ethnography from this charged climate. Inevitably, the conduct and description of empirical work will reflect the meshing of the ethnographer's background and personal convictions with particular opportunities for research. However, just as naive empiricism, which is nothing more than a failure to reflect upon one's concepts, has not overcome or vitiated the normative associations of elite research, so the familiar anthropological doctrine of cultural relativism will not do for Anglo-American ethnographers involved with elite subjects (as a species of "primitive") in their own society, largely because scholarly and lay readerships are not inclined to accept work on elites in conformity with a relativist position.

One way to address explicitly the mixed normative-empirical aims of elite research is to ask questions about normative issues which can be empirically investigated. Ronald Cohen's paper in this volume makes an attempt at such empirically oriented normative research. Cohen places less emphasis upon the recruitment, integration, and power of elites (although knowledge of these is presupposed) than upon their degree of openness, accountability, and responsiveness. These attributes of elite organization are made salient by the liberal view that open, accountable, and responsive political economic structures are desirable, or at least that there will be predictable conflict between individuals occupying different social positions about the amount of openness, accountability, and responsiveness that is desirable. All of these variables focus attention on elite relationships to nonelites, and address the question whether, or how, elite power can be justified in societies which are ideologically suspicious of it.

Some may be wary of explicitly addressing normative issues, while others may argue that this kind of approach really does not escape either the narrow theoretical vision of conventional elite research or the limitations on the range of empirical phenomena it has covered. But there is much to be said in favor of bringing the normative dimension to the surface, because, intended or not, it has often constituted the *de facto*, major interest of and in this body of research.

## SUMMARY

The directions taken by elite theory and research have historically been determined by attempts to harness a concept, the strength of which has been its fluidity as a referent in ordinary discourse about

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society. Despite the resulting complications, elite theory and research did address (if not resolve) important questions about the salience of subjectively conceived agency in modern, rationalized social orders. At the same time, as a result of the outsider perspective inherent in the development of elite analysis, elite research has failed to pay systematic attention to the cultures and forms of life of those identified as elites. It is particularly ironic that the one kind of classic macro theory which was defined on a small-group, personal level of conceptualization then did not pursue as vigorously the analysis of the internal processes of elite organization. Ethnography of elites has the potential of filling this gap, and in so doing, the existing body of research, with its emphasis on the societal scope and effects of elite groups, is a necessary complement and condition for focused ethnographic studies.

The concept, theory, and the research tradition of the elite all have originated in a Euro-American cultural context and from historic changes in Western societies. This fact does not negate the usefulness of the elite concept for comparative analyses across cultural boundaries and historic periods. However, Western elite theory and the research tradition it inspired are more restricted in their comparative uses.

Since the version of Western elite theory that derived from Pareto and Mosca appeared in the context of the historic rationalization of older social orders through certain institutional innovations in political economy, then this particular theory is comparatively applicable where such a process has been recapitulated, or in a more realistic historic sense, where these Western models have spread. In the center-periphery imagery of world-system analysis (see Wallerstein 1974), classic elite theory is broadly applicable wherever nineteenth-century models of state and economy have incompletely taken hold, or have remained undeveloped, as viewed from the perspective of core capitalist states (these conditions apply to most of the contemporary world).

In its manifestation as an Anglo-American research tradition, an elite perspective is probably most relevant in comparisons among advanced capitalist societies in which the pluralism-power elite debate arose and then stalled on the ambiguity of forms of elite organization in fully developed and rationalized institutional orders. When it has taken advanced capitalist societies as its subject matter, the research tradition has had considerable difficulty in conceptually defining itself, and thus here it is most in need of revitalization.

So, as ethnographers study elites in a range of societies and attempt

to compare them, the existing research tradition is an uncertain guide to how this should be done, *except* in the Western capitalist societies where it was homegrown. In comparisons among these latter societies, an ethnographic perspective can offer important revisions in a body of research, where both attention to cultural processes within elite organizations and the set of concepts and issues for a societal analysis of elites have been inadequate.

## NOTES

1. Groups which are elites only to themselves fit well the characteristics of the category, the Secret Society, described by Simmel (Wolff 1950: 345–78), and also the model of informal organization, constructed by A. Cohen (1974: 65–89) in his discussion of group power and symbols in complex societies. In fact these typological exercises by Simmel and Cohen outline a kind of group under which all elite organizations—especially through their exclusivity—might be appropriately subsumed.

2. Wallerstein (1979: 169–83) provides one example of how different levels of conceptual abstraction can be neatly interwoven in the interesting notion that Weberian status group identities (which he views in ethnic terms, but which can also be seen as elite identities) are a blurred representation of class consciousness. One may certainly dispute the kind of analytical connection Wallerstein makes, but it has the virtue of plainly demonstrating the complementary, rather than conflicting, relationship of status group (elite) and class concepts.

3. In her work on state formation and revolutions (1979: 24–33), Skocpol discusses recent attempts to deal with the long-standing problem in Marxist theory of an inadequate treatment of the relationship between a dominant class and the state, supposedly the clear-cut tool of the former's interests. Skocpol favors a view which proposes the critical autonomy of the state in its own organizational domain. What's more, she emphasizes the importance of an understanding of the state's cadre—its elite—as an autonomous theoretical factor to be considered along with the influential institutional and class imagery of classic social theories. To the extent that this position represents a revival of interest in ambitious elite theory, related to the macro explanation of society in historical perspective, it has the great virtue of expanding the contexts of significance in which attention to elites is set.

4. A key body of literature to which both sides referred was that generated from Berle and Means's classic discussion of change in American economic organization (1932), since wealth derived from business activity has always been a salient characteristic of most forms of elite status in industrial societies. The growth and proliferation of the corporation was accompanied by a clear-cut separation between owners and managers, the latter of whom gained considerable autonomy in day-to-day operations. This development would

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seem to be a strong support for the pluralist position, but with varying persuasiveness, elite theorists have attempted to demonstrate the crosscutting connections of informal elite organization. This demonstration would counter the notion that either coherence or the influence of a core societal elite of wealth based on corporate ownership has declined (see in particular the recent, convincingly argued paper by Zeitlin [1974]).

5. For a long while, Baltzell's account of Philadelphia's old elite (1958) has stood as the only in-depth sociological study of a contemporary American elite community. More recently, Coles (1977) has described childhood experience in a diffuse sampling of wealthy households. The long-established genre of dynastic family histories has perhaps provided the most vivid source of information on one key segment of American elites (see the excellent recent accounts of Collier and Horowitz 1976; Hersh 1978; Koskoff 1978; and Moseley 1980).

6. While increasing explicit attention to elites, the social science literature of the 1960s on Third World development did not go so far as to give up a preference for formal institutional analysis in favor of a discussion of development issues in terms of informal, often family-based, elite social organizations. That is, social scientists persisted in discussing agency predominantly in terms of bureaucracies and formal market processes rather than in terms of family cliques and domains of control. Even where the substantive importance of such invisible elite organizations was admitted, relative to the weakness of rationalized bureaucratic process, these did not become an analytical focus in development studies. There are several plausible reasons why this was so: the political sensitivity of discussing other nation-states in this intimate way; a strong, ingrained bias toward institutional analyses among Western social scientists trained in home societies where this level of analysis is most comfortable; and relatedly, the practical difficulty of grasping in a systematic way elite organization given the existing preferences in social science method and theory, even though the key significance of elite culture has often been acknowledged in the development literature.



2  
A Review of  
Ethnographic Research on  
Elites in Complex Societies

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In turning their attention to complex modern societies, social and cultural anthropologists must modify at least two related features of their research styles, which have characterized ethnographic studies of small-scale, culturally homogeneous social units: (1) the close observation of and interaction with small numbers of ethnographic subjects, resulting in (2) a holistic perspective on the lives of these subjects and a generalizing view of the sociocultural systems of which they are members. In older ethnography, an inventory of arbitrarily demarcated, functionally interrelated subsystems (such as politics, economics, and religion) achieved the holism. More recently, the analysis of shared meanings and modes of communication has provided a different means by which ethnographic studies could appear to present a holistic account of the culture of a small social unit. However, the easiest way to conceive the totality of a complex society is not as a constellation of diverse small groups, but rather in terms of the objectified formal organizations of state and economy which unify them. In mass liberal societies, the only cultural worlds of shared meanings, in the conventional ethnographic sense, are the common denominators of intra-



cultural and individual variation such as the everyday-life, public-place conventions analyzed in the work of Erving Goffman, or certain mass activities like tourism (see, e.g., the ingenious structuralist analysis by MacCannell [1976]).

A well-established, but not innovative body of ethnographic research in complex societies has gone beyond the traditional community study to a variety of bounded settings and foci, such as workplaces, homes, bars, jails, hospitals, or even issues and crises, which generate momentary group formation. This is still the most conventional way to do ethnography in complex, institutionally differentiated societies; it isolates parts for holistic treatment, but leaves direct perspectives on total social systems to other kinds of specialists. In so doing, it evades the challenge of how ethnographic research, through the study of particular subjects, can account for or describe whole systems of societal organization.

A focus is needed on subjects, who can be conceived in bounded, observable units, but whose concerns and activities dominate the larger system processes of the societies of which they are members. As demonstrated in the historic review of the concept, the focus on elites has provided just such a personal, small-group perspective on large-scale dynamics. Elites span formal organizations of state and economy, which organize populations and territory in modern societies, and create their own subcultures around their institutional functions and involvements. In their internal concerns and relationships, elites, as distinct from nonelites, are directly involved in defining the boundaries of social systems and institutional processes within them. Although other kinds of subcultures in their internal activities also reflect the workings of larger structures, elites by definition are the only subcultures that consciously organize themselves to directly encompass larger structures. Thus any study of elite culture forces the ethnographer at the same time to deal with larger system processes and how elites both subjectively and objectively figure in them.

Elites are culturally both similar and dissimilar to others in their societies, but the kind of holistic perspective that an elite focus promises is not one based on the notion that a set of subjects, situated as a community, reflects in microcosm the total population. This assumption of holism, although common in anthropology, is of questionable validity; it is certainly not valid in a complex society, the coherence

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of which depends on the coordination of hierarchically organized formal institutions. The focus on elites is one powerful analytical means of reducing this complexity to a form with which anthropologists are familiar—that of small-scale processes and relationships of human subjects, who most closely affect the operation of formal organizations.

There is danger in this kind of reductionism. An awareness that the elite focus is only a partial theory, necessarily linked with broader theoretical issues and complementary concepts concerning institutions and classes, is perhaps the best protection of ethnographers from the position that events can be explained as resulting solely from elite agency—a position arising from elitist conceptions that have often been subtly embedded in elite research and in the writing of history. Rather, specifying the mutually determining connections between overlapping elite organizations and institutional orders—human agency and rationalized process—seems to be the most fruitful way to expand the significance of intensive elite studies in mass liberal societies. As noted, in societies where rationalized institutional authority is in fact weak, the independent significance of elite analysis as a framework for macro-level theory is enhanced.

There have actually been a number of studies of elites in the ethnographic literature produced by Anglo-American anthropologists, but these have been scattered, have rarely been reflective about the nature and use of the elite concept cross-culturally, and have been done in contexts either where it seemed “natural” to study elites (e.g., high-caste Hindu culture in India, chiefs in African kingdoms) or where a focus on elites was entailed by a related, but predominant research interest in political economy (e.g., the large literature on Latin American oligarchies). Elites in these ethnographic studies have been distinguished primarily in the simplistic way (e.g., see Nadel [1956]), relative to nonelites, rather than in relation to the total system of settled populations and institutional orders in which they function as elites. (See, however, the recent pioneering study by Abner Cohen [1981] of elite culture in Sierra Leone as an exception to these remarks.)

The remainder of this chapter catalogs the kinds of direct studies of elites that have been done by anthropologists,<sup>1</sup> of which the papers in this volume provide a representative sample. This is followed by a discussion of more indirect ways in which concern with elites has been manifest in past ethnographic research.

## DIRECT STUDIES OF ELITES

Much of the study of local-level, community elites in close interaction with nonelites (in this volume, see Greenhouse) has been done within the topical framework of political anthropology and has concerned leadership in tribal and peasant societies—the study of chiefs, brokers, and big men. A few of these studies have been primarily focused on elites (e.g., see Barth 1959 and Vincent 1971), while most address elites in passing, as one part of the study of local politics (see Swartz 1968). During the period when community studies per se were a sufficient rationale for ethnographic research, treatment of elites and upper classes was sometimes given a prominent place (as in Whiteford's Latin American urban ethnography, 1960; also note the attention given by the Lynds to elite Family X in *Middletown in Transition*, 1937, a glaring omission from their earlier work, which they freely admitted). But passing attention to elites was generally a rule rather than an exception in the community study literature.

The study of bureaucratic elites in the institutional orders of modern states by anthropologists is still relatively rare (but see Bailey in this volume).<sup>2</sup> However, in conceptualization, the study of bureaucratic elites is close to local community elites in that the formal institutional context has been treated as analogous to the community or tribal setting in terms of which a political field and elites have been defined for ethnographic analysis. As in studies of local-level politics, bureaucratic elites have generally been isolated for analysis rather than viewed conceptually in the framework of larger social systems in which they are implicated. Indeed, it is often doubtful whether the subjects of such studies, when viewed in a broader systems context, would be attributed elite status.

The study of elites in colonial polities and in the political economy of development and state formation (in this volume, see the papers by the Rudolphs, the Schneiders, and Cohen) has often dealt with elites in relation to institutional development and larger system contexts. In colonial polities, studies of chiefs and old elites in change or in protected traditional political systems have been common among anthropologists (e.g., see Kuper 1961 and Busia 1968). In developing societies and new nations, studies of old and new elites were stimulated by broader interests in Third World development during the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s. Although much of this literature was produced by

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political scientists and economists (see, for example, Lipset and Solari 1967; Bonilla 1970; and Tachau 1975), anthropologists contributed a number of development-oriented studies of elites (e.g., Keesing and Keesing 1956, and Leach and Mukherjee 1970).

A much more historically informed and multidisciplinary interest in development followed the appearance of dependency theories, and most recently, a world-system perspective. During the late 1970s, this broader framework for elite research largely replaced the approaches mentioned above. The role of elites in the analysis of agrarian societies has been given special attention. Notably, in an ambitious synthetic paper, Carol Smith (1976) has proposed correlations between the spatial distribution of elites and the development of market systems as a theoretical framework for comparative analysis within the historical development of a modern world system. From a world-system perspective, the study of elites in societies where state formation is advanced (core industrial societies) would differ in fundamental respects from the study of elites in agrarian societies where state formation is relatively weak (peripheral areas). It is in the latter context that anthropologists have thus far developed a theoretically unfocused body of elite studies.

The ethnographic study of elites could thus be an important element in the development of political economy research. At present, although the importance of elites has often been acknowledged and incorporated into the theoretical development of this body of research, few ethnographic studies of elites have been done that are also conceived in broader theoretical terms (however, see the Schneiders' papers in this volume). If the way this significance of elites has been defined in the literature of political economy is any guide, then ethnographic studies would define subjects with reference to regional systems within and across given nation-state boundaries. Also, where Western-modeled institutional development is weak in agrarian societies, elite domination takes the classic form of rule by family-organized factions or oligarchies. Not only does this historic situation facilitate an elite focus in research, but it also makes elite analysis particularly relevant to anthropology's traditional concern with the study of kin-based groups (see, in particular, Firth 1963).

It is interesting to note that the lively impetus for a political-economy-oriented focus on elites has come from scholars working in Latin American and Mediterranean societies—the former, an active area of elite research during the 1960s and later, and the latter, the location

in which classic elite theories were produced. The conceptual accessibility of elite organization through the study of family units in these areas of quite overt ruling classes has made elite research very appealing (see Wolf 1966; Strickon and Greenfield 1972; Hansen 1977; Balmori and Oppenheimer 1979; and Lewin 1979).

The study of elites as a distinct category of persons in analyses of intracultural variation in life-style and culture (in this volume, see the papers by Greenhouse, the Schneiders, and Marcus) focuses especially on kinship (see Schneider and Smith 1973 and Geertz and Geertz 1975). Also, but more rarely, in studies of modes of thought and life-styles, anthropologists have created inclusive cultural models and then distinguished elite subcultural variations. *Elite* as a category has been used interchangeably with "upper class," "the wealthy," or "the privileged" to designate broadly social differentiation within cultures. In this usage, elites are equivalent to the large segments of a population that define the pool (or if applicable, the upper class) from which more narrowly conceived elites, tied to their institutional functions, are recruited. This style of analysis focuses not so much on elite agency as on the exclusivity of elite life-style. Also, it presents elite practices relative to the practices of nonelites, rather than in relation to impersonal systems of institutions and territories. While the tendency in most elite research has been to think of elites in terms of their marked differences from nonelites, the virtue of elite analysis in the context of an interest in intracultural variation is that it emphasizes the relative, rather than absolute, differences between elites and nonelites who share the same basic cultural models.

The study of elites may focus on individual life histories, family histories, and the analysis of texts and ideologies (in this volume, see papers by the Rudolphs and Marcus). Life history is a well-known genre in anthropology, particularly within the field of culture and personality. Peasants and common men have most often been subjects (notably in the work of Oscar Lewis), but there has also been a less-pronounced interest in the lives of great men, leaders, and political elites (e.g., see Mandelbaum 1973 and Wilkie 1973).

Family history is an important form of research for ethnographers of elites, particularly in those societies where elite organization is primarily family based. Socialization, domestic life, and gender roles—typical concerns of ethnographic research—are particularly well described in biographies of elites and in family histories, and they com-

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plement the usually greater attention to elite activities that derive from their functions in formal institutions (e.g., see Carstairs 1956; Rudolph and Rudolph 1975, and in this volume; and Lomnitz 1979).

The study of particular texts that express elite doctrines, world views, and ideologies can offer a valuable perspective on elite mentality. Intensive analyses of written or spoken elite texts are relatively rare, but are most common for societies where a literature, sacred texts, or a body of documents have been particularly important in the legitimation of elites (for example, see Tyler's discussion of the Sástric literature of India 1975). Elite texts also appear in oral and enacted forms as oratory, formal etiquette, and the debates that occur over protocol on ritual occasions (see Bloch 1975).

### INDIRECT CONCERNS WITH ELITES

The following indirect ways in which many ethnographers are concerned with elites may seem tangential to elite research, but it is worth making explicit that the basis for such research is already laid down in the existing pragmatics of doing fieldwork.

In undertaking fieldwork, anthropologists have always been concerned with elites both as channels into particular field settings and as potential or primary informants in these settings. Local elites—headmen, schoolteachers, religious specialists, and persons who more generally serve as brokers between the village world and beyond—act as protectors of fieldworkers and provide them with a source of cultural exegesis. Explanations by self-reflective members of cultures about the nature of their societies have always been an important source of data in ethnographic research. Although elites are not the only sources of such explanations, they are often an initial and continuing source of indigenous interpretation for fieldworkers. Even if ethnographers are not actually studying elites, they nonetheless come to depend on the interpretations of culture that elites provide.<sup>3</sup> There is thus an important sense in which standard ethnographic research embodies the perspectives that elites offer as the hosts and friends of researchers.

Entering the field often requires good contacts at various levels of organization in a society. If the ethnographer is fortunate, these contacts begin, not within the society in question, but with members of the society's elite who study in Anglo-American universities. Such students are often from families of influence and high status in their

home societies. I myself have benefited immensely from such ties (in facilitating my Tongan fieldwork), as have many other ethnographers with a wide range of specific research interests. Cohen's work on elite formation in northern Nigeria (see his paper in this volume) is an example of research that has been facilitated by and based on personal relationships that were rooted in academic associations.

Because of the relative accessibility of such university-educated elites, anthropologists have produced more studies of so-called modern elites, whose members have been educated in Western universities, than of elites who have resisted or avoided training in the West. Primary attention in the 1960s development-oriented literature on elites was directed to the technocrats and intellectuals of the new nations, while important elites trained in other traditions, particularly in Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia, were much less studied and known (for a striking recent exception, see Fischer's 1980 examination of the education of Islamic clergy in Iran as a backdrop to the revolution). There were of course other reasons why Western-trained elites were most studied in the era of development studies, but the overseas university connections and shared culture between new elites and scholars have been an important factor accounting for the skewed literature on Third World elites.

Furthermore, even if there were no such university ties, establishing oneself as a researcher in other societies requires the active goodwill, or at least the acquiescence, of local elites, and for this reason some working knowledge of local elite organization is needed in order to conduct most forms of ethnographic research. Ethnographers thus learn much about elite organization in entering a society, and those ethnographers who are elite researchers need only pursue this practical research requirement to their full advantage.

Whatever nonelite group ethnographers are studying, they become aware of how elites impinge on their subjects' social relationships and activities. Just as elites have a hazy place in Western imagery, they are ambivalently and incompletely described in the accounts often given by an ethnographer's subjects, which define the sources of personified agency and the boundaries of status and exclusivity in their societies. Thus, by their work with nonelites, ethnographers often implicitly establish in their data collection the boundaries and characteristics of elite organization. Ethnographers of elites merely take as a central

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concern the background understandings about elites that are expressed by the nonelite subjects of most ethnographic research.

It might be claimed that certain assumptions commonly made by ethnographers about the motives of their subjects are in fact most particularly useful in interpreting elite behavior. Human actors in many ethnographic contexts are assumed to be self-interested, means-ends game players who compete with each other for power and influence in defined arenas of activity. Yet, this view has a more specific application. It is the standard framework used by Western social scientists to study interpersonal process as politics among those who are self-consciously active politically, that is, in many cases, elites.

### SUMMARY

Like studies done within the Anglo-American elite research tradition, direct anthropological studies of elites have been preponderantly concerned with political elites, or with the political behavior of other kinds of elites. However, anthropologists have tended more than other researchers to take into account diverse aspects of the lives of their elite subjects. They have been inclined to view the behavior and culture of elites against the background of general cultural models shared with nonelites. In the study of complex societies, this can be a weakness in that it elides the indirectness with which elites relate to populations of nonelites through mediating, objectified bureaucratic structures.

There are relatively few studies by anthropologists of elites in bureaucratic or institutional contexts. Also lacking are anthropological studies of elites at the national level of complex societies, or elites whose organization must be defined internationally. Existing ethnographic studies of elites have been done primarily in dependent/developing nation-states rather than in advanced capitalist societies. In recent theoretical perspectives on the political economy of contemporary agrarian societies, the emphasis on the study of regions, and of elites within this spatial framework, has been an advance over the standard community context for elite studies. If ethnographic studies are to be done in advanced capitalist societies, analyses of elites which are set in a combined regional and institutional systems framework are likely to be most fruitful and most manageable. However, interesting work on national and international elite domains by journalists (see



especially Halberstam 1972 and Morgan 1979), which is broadly similar in style to ethnographic research, suggests areas which ethnographers might profitably explore.

A body of ethnographic research done in complex societies would improve upon the mapping efforts of the Anglo-American elite research tradition. Such research would sort out formal levels of societal organization and the kinds of elite organizations associated with these various levels. The elite groups that are nested at different levels of societal organization can differ greatly in character. A primary goal of research should be to track the changing characteristics and interrelationships of elite groups as institutional changes occur. For example, power elite formations may become diffuse leadership groups in one region, while during the same historic period, leadership groups may coalesce into a power elite in another region and at another level of formal societal organization (e.g., see the second paper by the Schneiders in this volume). Presumably, changing patterns in the organization of discrete elite groups would be found to be related generally to changes in more abstractly conceived processes of class and state formation.

Finally, within an elite organization, out-of-power, retired, or marginal members are likely to be the subjects most accessible to ethnographers. Accessibility is a fundamental factor affecting not which elite groups can be studied, but who in any field of elite relationships will serve as subjects and informants for ethnographers. It is among elites in decline or of marginal importance in their fields of activity that ethnographic research can most likely be done.

## NOTES

1. The large body of elite studies by social historians is excluded from consideration in this review. Much of this literature concerns reconstructions of the social and cultural conditions of European aristocracies during various past periods. The best of these studies are similar to what ethnographers could do. To mention one, Stone's study (1965) of the sixteenth-century English aristocracy not only succeeds in providing a detailed, internal view of elite culture, but it also places this portrait in a context of significance, which addresses major changes in the structure of English society. If historians were more self-consciously inclined to construct theories, Stone's analysis could be seen as a skillful merging of micro and macro theoretical perspectives.

2. There is, however, a large literature on bureaucracy in other social science disciplines, some of which discusses informal domains of institutional

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elites, which track formal processes (e.g., Bernard 1938; Crozier 1964; and Downs 1967). See also the recent volume edited by Britan (1981) and the self-consciously anthropological treatment of Congress by Weatherford (1981).

3. Reichel-Dolmatoff's *Amazonian Cosmos* (1971) is an excellent example of a tribal group's world view, derived primarily from office interviews with a single transcultural informant. In an illuminating, sensitive conclusion, Reichel-Dolmatoff discusses how the coherent world view he presents might be shared differentially as knowledge among the Tukano. He identifies a level of advanced knowledge and ability as wisdom, which would define elite status among this small tribe. His own account roughly approximates the "wisdom" version of Tukano knowledge.



# Elite Communities and Institutional Orders

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The discussions of the previous chapters and those of the SAR seminar continually returned to the importance of studying elite groups in their integral relationships with the evolution and operation of public, formal institutional orders. As noted, the elite concept has been more closely associated with human controlling functions in the institutions than it has with the more abstract process of social class formation. This is particularly true in mass liberal societies, without aristocracies or clearly demarcated upper classes. While members of elites may often view themselves as comprising a distinct class, the study of elites is conceptually autonomous from the study of classes even in societies where members of an elite group are recruited from a particular class. The culture of elites is most immediately developed within informal organizations that originate in building or maintaining a given institutional order. This elite culture always exists as a distinct overlay upon the class or regional culture of its members, owing to its autonomous development in a field of activity tied to functions within (or in opposition to) corporate, bureaucratic entities (see, for example, Skocpol's arguments about the autonomy of state elites or cadres [1979: 24–33]).

Elites make their own communities out of corporate orders. Institutions, specialized and hierarchical, rationalize and compartmentalize routine social processes in complex societies. In communicating among themselves, members of elites—those most intimately involved with institutions and having most control over them—reintegrate this fragmentation. From apparently disparate formal organizations, they create a mutually shared, tacit praxis as the basis for an informal order that cuts across formal distinctions and modifies the operation of formal procedures. These distinctions and procedures then apply monolithically to others and constitute the effective and indirect means of elite domination. Thus, elite organization accomplishes the reconstitution of one kind of rules (bureaucratic codes and procedures that are publically available) through the creation of other rules of a different type (tacit, operational rules) in order to make formal organizations serve the interests, however defined, of the members of the elite. While most studies of bureaucracy (see Bernard 1938; Blau 1963; Crozier 1964; Downs 1967) document the existence of informal worlds within formal ones, they fail to explore systematically the relationships between informal and formal orders. This exploration remains a central task for an ethnography of elites (see Bailey's paper in this volume and his 1977 study of academic politics).<sup>1</sup>

The ethnography of elites needs also to address the classic problem of the succession or circulation of elites. At any time, there are overlapping old, in-power, new, and up-and-coming elites (the latter including counter-elites and leaders of self-consciously populist, antielitist groups) in active relationships within and across the bounds of elite communities. These developmental distinctions may be pronounced or not (see Cohen's paper in this volume for a discussion of distinguishing elites by stage of development).

In complex societies, old elites leave their strongest traces in the particular new institutions they have created, and in the modifications they have worked upon older institutions. Once they have faded away or given up active functions, old elites may bequeath their influence in an institutionalized form—doctrines outlive their creators. This effect is very similar to Weber's notion of routinization and represents past forms of power or prestige institutionalized as policy or formal edifice in the present. In American history, for example, the upper-class colonial gentry of the Northeast had retreated from direct political rule by the mid-nineteenth century, but they came to dominate the

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educational institutions that socialized later generations of elites of different origins. In this way, they continued to leave their mark on the elites of the industrial age (see Jaher 1972; Persons 1973; Story 1980). In turn, the post-Civil War national elite of entrepreneurial families declined in prominence by the mid-twentieth century, but their influence has also survived them by the channeling of their concentrated wealth into powerful bureaucratic institutions of education and culture such as universities and philanthropic foundations (see Marcus's paper in this volume).

Thus, in historic perspective, formal institutions with cultural and business functions embody the transformations of elites as family-based organizations. It is through institution building and the institutionalization of their personal fortunes that aging elites can perpetuate their influence and give a stabilizing "class effect" to an elite organization—not class in relation to the market, but class as a rigidified legacy of ideas and institutions (which is the sense in which the classic Italian elite theorists used the term *class*, and Antonio Gramsci used the term *hegemony*). The intimate developmental relation between elites and institutional orders can be most clearly seen, then, in the internal stratification of elite groups at any point in time.

In establishing an analytic perspective from which to view the interplay between institutions and associated elite communities, researchers typically have no difficulty conceptualizing the manifest institutional order—the formal structures, offices, and operations of the state and corporate entities—which is there for all to see and which is in fact taught as part of the curriculum of public education in most societies organized as nation-states. In contrast, the murky, if not invisible, quality of elite domains or communities within this order has long posed the central problem for scholars working in the elite research tradition. Ethnographers, who isolate small groups for close observation and analysis, are less interested in providing a more or less concrete structural image of a usually fluid set of relationships than in describing the cultural substance of the relationships themselves. Nonetheless, they must confront this problem, for the ways in which they conceptualize the structure of elite organizations can shape what they have to say about cultural processes within them.

In some societies, elite analysis is both obvious and easy because elite family groups are as visible as the political and economic institutions that they dominate or compete against. Such societies include,

among others, those of Mediterranean Europe, most of Latin America, England in the eighteenth century, and the United States during the entire nineteenth century. In these societies, the identity of individuals as elites was inextricably tied, in both popular perceptions and private circles, to the standing of their families as distinctive social forces in a particular geopolitical region or arena of economic activity. It is no accident that the majority of anthropological studies have been done in such societies, not only because the problem of conceptualizing the form that elite organizations take is much less difficult, but also because the study of social structures organized around kin groups has been anthropology's traditional, comfortable medium.

In extensively rationalized capitalist societies, family background is still a major factor in attributions of elite status, but family groups no longer play a dominant or widespread role in elite organization except perhaps in certain vestigial pockets—in certain locales, ethnic groups, and industries where the penetration of bureaucratic, corporate organization is incomplete in even the most rationalized societies. Hansen and Parrish in this volume argue that family-based elite organization remains important even in advanced capitalism, and Marcus's paper discusses the form of elite family-based units in societies which are clearly not oligarchical or patrimonial in character. Anthropology's pursuit of its traditional subject matter, frequently to the advantage of elite research, dies hard.

The conception of an ethnography of elites in advanced capitalist societies nevertheless presents more of a challenge than in societies where state formation is less developed (primarily agrarian societies with Western-modeled sectors), since elite organization in the former emerges from vast, amorphous middle classes, rather than from easily definable aristocracies and upper classes.<sup>2</sup> In mass liberal societies, characterized by a large, affluent middle class and mobile status hierarchies, elite life-styles with varied and largely illusory degrees of authenticity may themselves be commodities eagerly sought for mass consumption (witness, for example, the popularity of *Ultra* magazine in the United States), whereas distinctive, exclusive life-styles, complementary to elite institutional functions, may not be salient or even exist in some authentic elite communities (see Giddens's argument, 1973: 176, about the paradoxical egalitarian ideologies of elites in advanced capitalist societies).

The subtlety and indirectness of elite activities in highly bureau-

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cratized, capitalist societies is well expressed by Pierre Bourdieu in his discussion of modes of domination (Bourdieu 1977: 183–97). His concern is largely with societies or locales where the relation of elite to nonelite is direct and unmediated by major bureaucratic institutions (e.g., tribes, lineages, and village communities), but for contrast, he says a good deal about societies where elaborate, objectified processes of institutional operations intercede between elites and their constituencies. Between the two types of societies he notes major differences in the mode of reproducing (institutionalizing) these relations. In pre-capitalist societies, elites tend directly and constantly to re-create relations of dominance; in capitalist societies, elites depend on institutional orders (and their internal functionaries) to express their interest. Elites may guide or constrain the policies of institutions, but they are several removes from those whom they dominate. In such isolation, elites are somewhat blind to their full social reach and are free in personal relations to be as egalitarian, as bigoted, or as eccentric as they wish, since their “force” in society does not require their constant attention (see Marcus’s paper this volume).

It is worth quoting Bourdieu at some length on this distinction (1977: 189–90, 193–94):

The greater the extent to which the task of reproducing the relations of domination is taken over by objective mechanisms, which serve the interests of the dominant group without any conscious effort on the latter’s part, the more indirect and, in a sense, impersonal, become the strategies objectively oriented towards reproduction: it is not by lavishing generosity, kindness, or politeness on his charwoman (or on any other “socially inferior” agent), but by choosing the best investment for his money, or the best school for his sons that the possessor of economic or cultural capital perpetuates the relationship of domination which objectively links him with his charwoman and even her descendants. Once a system of mechanisms has been constituted capable of objectively ensuring the reproduction of the established order by its own motion (*apo tou automatou*, as the Greeks put it), the dominant class have only to *let the system they dominate take its own course* in order to exercise their domination; but until such a system exists, they have to work directly, daily, personally, to produce and reproduce conditions of domination which are even then never entirely trustworthy. Because they cannot be satisfied with appropriating the profits of a social machine which has not yet developed the power of self-perpetuation, they are obliged to resort to the elementary forms of domination, in other words, the direct domination of one person by another, the limiting case of which is appropriation of persons, i.e. slavery. They cannot appropriate the labour, services, goods, homage, and respect of



others without “winning” them personally, “typing” them—in short, creating a bond between persons. . . .

In short because the delegation which is the basis of personal authority remains diffuse and is neither officially declared nor institutionally guaranteed, it can only be lastingly maintained through actions whose conformity to the values recognized by the group is a practical reaffirmation of that authority. It follows that in such a system, the “great” are those who can least afford to take liberties with the official norms, and that the price to be paid for their outstanding value is outstanding conformity to the values of the group, the source of all symbolic value. The constitution of institutionalized mechanisms makes it possible for a single agent (a party leader or union delegate, a member of a board of directors, a member of an academy, etc.) to be entrusted with the totality of the capital which is the basis of the group, and to exert over this capital, collectively owned by all the “shareholders,” a delegated authority not strictly related to his personal contribution; but in precapitalist societies, each agent shares directly in the collective capital, symbolized by the name of the family or lineage, to an extent directly proportionate to his own contribution, i.e. exactly to the extent that his words, deeds, and person are a credit to the group. The system is such that the dominant agents have a vested interest in virtue; they can accumulate political power only by paying a *personal* price, and not simply by redistributing their goods and money; they must have the “virtues” of their power because the only basis of their power is “virtue”. . . .

In the societies where most anthropological studies of elites have been done there are mixtures of both modes of domination discussed by Bourdieu (see, in particular, the Rudolphs’ paper on bureaucratic lineages in this volume). A major purpose of such studies is to sort out the complex relationship of family-based elite organizations, in which “each agent shares directly in the collective capital, symbolized by the name of the family or lineage” to institutional orders or objective mechanisms, “which serve the interests of the dominant group without any conscious effort on the latter’s part. . . .” One can think of historic conditions where these objective mechanisms are out of sync with local elite groups which they putatively represent, and there results a sharp conflict between upper-class interests, manifested in the actions of a group of politically active families in opposition to or in competition with a set of institutions that are not fully within their control (for examples, see Schneider, Schneider, and Hansen 1972).

In his discussion of cousinhoods as a form of elite organization in complex societies (1974: 110–18), Abner Cohen presents a very good comparison of two societies, illustrating variations in the mix of Bour-

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dieu's modes of domination. Both groups discussed by Cohen—the national Creole elite of Sierra Leone and elite families among the Anglo-Jewish community of Britain—exist in societal environments which combine powerful families and powerful institutions. In the Creole case, a group of elite lineages in an agrarian society with sectors of Western-modeled polity and economy organizes its nonelite constituencies on the basis of extended kinship, personal relations, and the “elementary forms of domination” appropriate to precapitalist societies. Vertical chains of clientage link the general population to the elite lineages, and the formal institutional order is largely subordinated as areas of control shared by dominant families. In the Anglo-Jewish case, elite lineages in an advanced capitalist society collectively manage their relations to their ethnic constituency through their funding and sponsorship of formal philanthropic institutions. In the imagery of social class, elite Jewish families are segregated horizontally from their clients through their invisible hand in the workings of particular bureaucratic institutions. In the former Creole case, then, domination is a matter of daily and carefully tended interactions; in the latter Anglo-Jewish case, it is more abstractly achieved, but no less real.

Cohen argues generally for the anthropological study of informal organizations linked to the differentiated, specialized corporate structures of modern complex societies. Such “invisible” organizations are the “lineages” of complex society (Cohen's metaphor for units analogous to those of tribal societies and thus susceptible to traditional ethnographic analysis). However, Cohen's most cogent examples of “invisible” organizations are those that can be tied at least in part to literal lineages or elite groups, based on kin principles, however fictive the resulting relationships may become in the actual formation of a group.

For an ethnography of elites, what then of societies or locales of study in which elite activities are truly invisible and cannot be conceptualized in terms of units rooted in social structure, such as families? Here, elite communities are composed of individuals who pass through institutional processes that make them elites and then take up elite positions in the overt and covert management of major institutions which define their functions. Such communities may, like the power elites of patrimonial societies, crosscut formal boundaries and dominate institutions, rather than being dominated and fragmented by them,

but it is often not obvious that these elite collectivities are organized as extended family groups. Not only pluralist elite researchers, but also some partisans of the power elite view, would readily accept this prevalence of structural diversity in the elite organizations of advanced capitalist societies.

The social sciences have developed numerous concepts to handle noncorporate forms of association and organization in complex societies (for reviews, see Wolf 1966; Mitchell 1969; Barnes 1972). Network, field, faction, clique, domain, and patron-client dyad, among others, are common images for units in which ethnographic research in complex societies has often been set. These capture the highly fluid character of relationships that operate within and across corporate structures of contemporary capitalist societies. There are, however, two main difficulties with the use of any such terms. First, their use still tends to overstructure a phenomenon, which resists the kind of concreteness inherent in analytical discourse. One control in elite research is to test the observer's terminology against the elite subjects' collective and varied assessments of how tight or loose, and how bounded, their associations are. Second, all these terms are usually anchored to some orienting focus such as a particular actor's point of view. If an overall, topographical observer's perspective on an elite organization is desired, it is difficult to escape an ego focus or specific point of view, implicit in most uses of the domain, field, or network construct.

There is no fully satisfactory way around these problems of conceptualizing particularly elusive elite organizations in advanced capitalist societies. The investigator can only settle on some analytic framework which combines images drawn from the available array of "nongroup" concepts with discovered, appropriate metaphors. These latter come either from the vivid analogies that the investigator independently makes between what he observes and classic, ancien régime images of elite organization, or preferably from the self-images elicited from elite subjects themselves. In my own research, I have found that bureaucratic and dynastic family elites in contemporary America do often have metaphorical conceptions of "how their respective games are really played" (as opposed to what is evident to the public), and that they, like the investigator, draw on virtually the same historic images of feudal society to characterize (in interviews and presumably to each other) their field of relationships more concretely. Such terms as *kingmaker*, *baronies*, *fiefdoms*, *autocrats*, and *princes*

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are metaphors in frequent use by both social commentators and elite subjects themselves to convey an image or sense of coherence to an otherwise invisible, elusive world of mutual understandings (see the manner in which alternative forms of elite organization in the university are conceived by Bailey in this volume, and presumably by the administrators he interviewed). For example, in shrewd, iconoclastic reinterpretations of ideologically sacred American personality types and institutions, Garry Wills in *Nixon Agonistes* suggests that the institutions most indicative of American democracy—political parties and unions—have been fundamentally aristocratic and elitist in nature (1971: 464–66):

Machines were not models of participatory democracy, or of any kind of democracy—even when operating “for the people,” their decisions were not made “by the people.” What were the machines, then, if not democracies? The answer can be found in their function: they were instant, artificially formed aristocracies, performing the tasks of a traditional aristocracy in return for personal privilege or status. The machine man was *padrone*. The machine’s operations—its deals, favors, interests—were a crass version of the subtler, traditional, understated social arrangement whereby an aristocracy performs services for others in order to retain privilege for itself. The aristocracy can be middle class as in Lewis’ Gopher Prairie (or commercial, as in Zenith); rural, as in Faulkner’s Jefferson; exploitative, as in Sinclair’s Chicago; fading, as in Marquand’s Boston. But it exists to give stability to society, and it can only strengthen itself by making the advantages of this stability apparent to non-aristocrats. . . . Since the employer would not be a boss in the sense of a *padrone*, union leaders created a new machine. Their organizations did not aim merely at better pay for the workers, but at job tenure, welfare security, social stability—all the services that arise from a sense of community. The unions were, therefore, conservative and aristocratic, counteracting the openness and liberalism of free-agent entrepreneurs . . . . The union’s conservatism reveals itself in many ways—in a stress on rank (apprenticeship, seniority, offices), on loyalty (to “the brothers” but also to the bosses, and to a structure of fraternal-lodge gradations within the union), on bourgeois values (like patriotism, thrift, religion).

Thus, Wills penetrates the presumed reality of institutions to capture their inner, invisible workings. He does this by effectively calling up past elite images generally shared in American culture. Perhaps in not so journalistic a style, this technique of describing elite organization has been irresistible to all elite researchers.

Especially for ethnographers who pay particular attention to the

cognitive construction of their subjects' worlds, but who ultimately desire an analytic, observer's account of an elite organization, metaphors, current among subjects or composed independently by ethnographers to suggest implicitly a historical analogy, can reveal considerably more than thin, bare-bones images like *network*, *field*, *domain*, or *clique*.<sup>3</sup> Discovering novel ways to conceive Cohen's "invisible" organizations, which are so important in the institutional processes of contemporary society, remains an undeveloped area for innovation in the anthropology of complex societies, but particularly in elite research.<sup>4</sup>

Whether family-based organization figures in the formation of particular elite communities or not, one can project three kinds of studies that might profitably be done by ethnographers on the relation of elites to institutional orders in contemporary capitalist societies:

(1) The study of elites as cadres or functionaries within the bounds of particular institutions (see Bailey's paper in this volume). This kind of study purposefully narrows the frame of reference by which an elite is defined and is thus the easiest and most conventional form for the ethnographic study of elites in relation to their institutional worlds to take.

(2) The study of "the" or "an" establishment—a set of elite-founded and elite-generating formal institutions, such as foundations and research institutes, that represent a point of view and vested interest within a broader bureaucratic and economic order. Defining the domain of study is considerably more difficult than in the study of elite cadres, since the ethnographer must demarcate both a set of institutions and a crosscutting elite community as subject matter. The recent study by Silk and Silk (1980) of the American Establishment does an excellent job of operationally defining this highly charged construct. They discuss, in succession, a set of influential elite institutions that situate themselves outside the operations of major political and economic institutions. Yet their work is far from adequate in delineating the informal elite communities which have created and animate these institutions. Although the study of an establishment is, in part, the study of formal organizations, it also involves the difficult problem of describing the invisible elite communities that give rise to these organizations and are also generated by them.

(3) Elite communities, involved with particular institutions, but as their competitors and opponents. Similar to antibodies, these elite

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organizations originate in response to the challenge of intrusive, institutional processes, which they do not control and which act to limit their diverse interests or at least to change the conditions by which the locally powerful operate. These communities are essentially interest groups which might otherwise exist as a casually associating upper class. Instead, members of the latter crystallize into ephemeral action networks from a pool of preexisting potential relationships; they manifest organizational characteristics that are extremely difficult to define because of the limited coordination, privacy, and spontaneity surrounding such "circles" or crystallized associations. Such communities in opposition to institutional policies or administrations may have a public face such as a voluntary association or party, but they often do not, and in such cases, they are the murkiest of elite communities (the most extreme and perverse forms of oppositional, invisible organization are terrorist communities, which by definition are self-styled elites as vanguards of real or imagined revolutionary classes).

Whichever kind of study an ethnographer may undertake, the central task is the same: to provide a cultural and structural account of the informal elite communities that develop in some distinctive relationship to formal institutional processes. This chapter will conclude with discussions of two issues with which any ethnography of elite communities in the societies of advanced capitalism must deal: looking outward, and particularly when exposed to its public, an elite must justify itself or manifest a pose of legitimacy in societies that ideologically, at least, eschew elitism; and looking inward, elites must reduce to human terms within the framework of their knowable communities the vastly more complex and objectified worlds which their actions, narrowly conceived, significantly affect.

When faced with public exposure, however infrequently this occurs in mass liberal societies where the objectified mode of domination discussed by Bourdieu prevails, elites must adopt a pose that justifies the privilege and power that they clearly manifest, or regardless, are suspected by their ambivalent constituencies of possessing. As Roberto Unger has emphasized (1976: 170–76), in mass liberal societies, where impersonal, corporate orders are the salient agents of everyday life, there really is no clear normative basis for the inequalities of power, privilege, and wealth evident in the activities of elite communities. Elites themselves have the most realistic and intimate understanding of the dynamics of power and inequality in modern societies and also

know that their vocal critics share this sophisticated realism. Given this, and barring an unrealistically rigid conformity to the narrow definition of their functions in institutional orders, what justifications can elites offer for their acts, without appearing conspiratorial or corrupt?

The answer is that in the absence of sacred legitimation or a mandate popularly accepted, contemporary elite communities have difficulty legitimating themselves to their public (compare, in contrast, the personification of virtue, according to Bourdieu, that elites must embody in the elementary mode of domination). It is no wonder then that owners of great wealth, who appear as passive elites without redeeming social functions, cultivate privacy and, when exposed, play upon their philanthropy, and that the more routinely exposed managers of great wealth and power can only offer expertise and professionalism as a legitimation for their positions. This technocratic pose is perhaps the most common form of elite legitimation in societies where the objectified mode of domination prevails. The authority of such elites rests either on specialized, superior knowledge, or on functions defined in law, which has evolved as the ultimate, abstract source of authority in mass liberal societies. Elites justify their authority by law or implicitly claim to serve the institutions of society in disinterested and rational ways (see the papers by Marcus and Bailey in this volume for treatments of expert ideologies), a claim that is the best public legitimation of themselves elites can offer in a world organized by rationalized, and apparently democratic, processes. These claims make sense only when seen in a context of involvement with institutions, for which elites are human counterpart agents. The neutralization of self-interest, a valorization of rational calculation, and an ethic of public service all work to harmonize elites with objectified institutional processes which are the widely taken-for-granted "given" of life in contemporary complex societies.

On the other side of elites' external ideology of legitimation are the internal working dogmas and truths about the world and the place of their community in it that they express to each other as they engage in mutually understood interpersonal politics. Within their own "small world," face-to-face concerns reduce the complexity of the larger world they powerfully affect to manageable interpersonal dimensions. The objectified mode of domination, which comfortably insulates elite communities both from the broader consequences of their acts and

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from the direct management of their interests, facilitates much of this reduction of complexity. Yet, even in the most isolated of elite communities, such as among those who passively own wealth rather than participate directly in transforming it into power, elites must formulate an in-group code that is interpersonal, but stands for their involvement in a vastly more complex world into which the reach of their community abstractly extends, but which is not fully within their own limited cognitive grasp.

The reduction of global complexity to knowable matters in elite communities involves a curious mixture of abstract and concrete styles of thought. Behind the technocratic pose, working truths within a community of experts often project the worlds they affect at a distance, through the use of a jargon vocabulary of highly abstract concepts. At the same time, within such a community, important decisions are made through more intimate understandings of interpersonal politics being played out on the basis of snap judgments, emotional reactions, and petty ambitions. The cognitive reduction of complexity in elite communities, looking out on larger worlds, by both these means, makes possible for elites a manageable perspective on the objectified institutional processes that both isolate and globally implicate them. Thus an important aspect of an ethnography of elites is to capture just how larger worlds are understood in the routine activities of an elite community.

How elites relate to the worlds from which they are insulated, but which they nonetheless dominate, is an issue addressed in a set of book-length interviews with Raymond Williams (1981). These interviews make an interesting connection between a key problem of realist fiction, which has been discussed by Marxist critics, and the ethnographic representation of elite organization and culture. Nineteenth-century realism declined as the societies it sought to represent holistically became, from the Industrial Revolution on, too complex to express satisfactorily in the delimited realm of the novel. Similarly, elites (and consequently, their ethnographers) face just as difficult a problem in encompassing the complex worlds that their affairs concern. In technocratic contexts, the use of statistics, systems theory, and other abstract frameworks of modeling became an aid and technique of questionable adequacy for capturing the "world" in order to manipulate it.<sup>5</sup>

It is worth quoting from the Williams interviews a section that



touches upon what might be considered both the major problem and the goal of the ethnographic representation of elite communities. The discussion is about Williams's ability in his own novels, which focus on working-class experience, to capture a whole society, and elites in particular (1981: 289–91):

(Williams). . . The farthest outer scale of social power with which the working class normally comes into direct contact is the level it encounters in a local confrontation. Now clearly one move that a fiction committed to a political perspective is going to make is to look at the higher levels of decision-making in the economy and society. How far up do you then go? Suppose I had gone to—what?—the board of the motor company, to the whole interlocking between it, the banks and the state machine. This would have been better, but it is precisely what fictionally is not easy to do. I still mainly know the actual ruling class only by reading about it. And it's incredibly difficult to create characters who you don't feel in the gut; at some level if you don't know who they are you perhaps don't have sufficient energy to project them. It is then that the university often functions as a displaced perception of the ruling social order. It seems to me that at least in that period, and it may still be true, the organized working class tended to see academic figures as pre-eminent examples of the ruling class precisely because they are at somewhat closer range to it. . . . So in a way *Second Generation* has some of the faults of the working-class perspective, which however are not only mine but are part of the way the system operates—that the farthest the ordinary perception of power can reach is some middle functionary. I have been continually struck by this limitation of horizon in working-class experience, as if that whole world of big corporations and banks is too remote to be really registered. I share in that. Not that I don't know the realities of power intellectually, but when it comes to writing about them imaginatively, it's a problem.

(Interviewers) It should be said that there are very few novels which attempt to range through a complete social and political scale of power. One work that can certainly be admired in this respect is *The First Circle* which does explore a dramatically hierarchical regime from top to bottom. But of course the USSR is very different in nature from a capitalist society, its social order is at once more uniform and its structure of power more transparent—in that sense it may be imaginatively more accessible. . . .

(Williams) What seems to me extraordinary in *The First Circle* is the perception of a system running right through all the relationships of the novel: finally when you arrive at the summit of the system with Stalin, he is still seen as part of it himself. That is an incredibly impressive achievement. One wishes for a similar integration in British terms, but the world of rather elegantly concealed power which is characteristic of ruling-class relations in this country is much more difficult to get at.

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(Interviewers) The Cecil King *Diaries* give a pretty startling impression of what the upper reaches of this world are like. The two most striking features of it . . . are the direct and unmediated personal relations between newspaper magnates, top civil servants, cabinet ministers, big businessmen and service chiefs; and the shedding of polite hypocrisies for brutally explicit discussions of the day-to-day realities of class struggle. . . .

(Williams) These are the equivalent of the sort of documents which Disraeli read to find out about the working class in the 19th century—novelists like him didn't know about workers from having broken bread with them. King's *Diaries* aren't the only such revelations. . . . When these people move outside their own circles, they are more careful—the shutters are put up. In fiction, I suppose that to some extent you've got to enjoy even wicked people to be able to write about them. . . . It would be necessary to see the function of the pleasures of food, drink and company in the tone of their arrogant decisions about how to dispose of everything from a factory to an army. If you can't convey how their relish in these generates the good feeling with which they are on occasion capable of conducting their affairs, you won't create credible characters. That ought to be compatible with seeing quite clearly what they do—but it is very difficult in practice.

Since the ethnography of elites inevitably addresses the above issues of external legitimation and the internal reduction of larger worlds, we can conclude with two observations about certain biases that are entailed in the consideration of these issues. First, all elite communities are likely to exhibit a conspiratorial mentality, verging on cynicism, in their activities and attitudes, which an ethnography must characterize. In-group knowledge and realism, combined with a public face that emphasizes idealism and humility, breeds a sophisticated normative relativism among elites which values the private over the public context, if only to facilitate their performances. Second, ethnographers of elites are likely to express an implicit or explicit moralistic tone that judges elites on the gap between the requirements and responsibilities of their position and the adequacy of their performance, which is never fully satisfactory in societies where elites always are other than they appear publically to be. Both of these biases derive from an interplay between real practice and ideal standards. An effort to measure and account for the differences between praxis and ideology—between cultural practice and cultural rule—has long been at the analytic heart of social and cultural anthropology itself. But for elites, such a distinction is the very essence of their lived experience. By sustaining different public and private faces, they constantly reproduce an antin-

omy that is difficult to reconcile. In so doing, they place themselves (and are placed by a suspicious public) in a bind, whereby they live between two realities, a private one which is comfortable and tends to make them conspiratorial, and an exposed one in which their actual performances are measured to their disadvantage, against public idealizations, or at least against narrow conceptions of elite positions.

What this means for the ethnography of elites is that the researcher must represent elite conspiratorial tendencies in a balanced way—a hard task to manage with a quality that has such negative associations. Ethnographers also find themselves judges of elite conduct, merely by providing an account of real-ideal distortions. This is inevitable, when in the very nature of the concept, one expects elites to *be* elite—better at what they do than nonelites (as will be recalled, expert capability is the major but normatively thin ideological resource in liberal societies that legitimates elites). Of course, most elites do less well than they are expected to do, especially when they are dealing blindly with the broader worlds they affect, as a function of the reductionist tendency in elite communities discussed above. The ethnographer is thus in a position biased toward assessing flaws and degrees of ineptness in elite behavior. It is perhaps a final irony that pushed to judgment of their elite subjects because of inherent characteristics of elite research, ethnographers in their writings come to play an even more god-like role in representing elite communities than elites themselves do in relation to their domains.

## NOTES

1. In his study of urban Uganda, Jacobson (1973) differentiates an elite of civil servants from the mass of the agrarian population. The civil servants develop a sense of community and boundary in their social worlds from their networks of association, which track career chains immersed in the geographically dispersed institutional apparatus of the Ugandan state. In contrast, the nonelite mass shares a rural-urban experience of community which is much more localized and fragmented by ethnic divisions. This manner of distinguishing elite from mass in African states (discussed and generalized by Colson 1974: 108–10) is an excellent illustration of the way that elite organization emerges from processes of state formation, and how elite domains tied to career networks and institutional orders become autonomous phenomena of social organization. Furthermore, the Ugandan elite is differentiated from nonelites by the fact of the far-reaching, societal scope of their associations. Ugandan elites see their reference communities in societal scope, while non-

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elites are, in comparison, localized. This scale differential is probably a general feature of elite organization, particularly in complex societies, where elite relations, in their concerns with integrating institutional orders, span regions and locales.

2. As pluralist arguments about elites in industrial societies have claimed, advanced societies, unlike developing ones, do not offer a salient unit of organization rooted in social structure (such as the family) in which elites can be conceived, nor do they tolerate overt premises of inequality or admit the operation of a class dynamic, by which elites can be ideologically defined.

3. For example, see Leeds's discussion (1964) of career patterns among Brazilian elites. His analysis is cast as an observer's model, which has been constructed, not as a direct reflection of elite subject models, but from a sensitivity to subjects' categories and conceptual metaphors. These have guided the strategy of description in Leeds's explanatory model. In itself, the focus on career patterns is an analytic choice, prompted by the centrality of career chains in Brazilian elite conceptions of the dynamic, organizing component of their fields.

4. In his recent presidential address to the American Anthropological Association (1980: 508–24), Paul Bohannon pinpoints the need to think in novel ways about the organization of modern societies. He cites with particular approval Virginia Hine's concept of the Segmented, Polycephalous, Idea-based Network (acronym: SPIN). This is a somewhat cumbersome structural concept to represent momentary social processes, but it does come to terms in a novel way with the problem of powerful "invisible" organizations that Abner Cohen discussed. A SPIN or something similar is what I have in mind as conceptual innovation in the ethnographic study of elites.

5. Halberstam's study (1972) of the American national elite and the orchestration of United States involvement in Vietnam is an excellent example of how narrow and lacking in wisdom was the putatively comprehensive systems thinking that was the prestige metaphor of praxis and "world" view among this elite in realistically defining an appropriate position for America in the world system of the 1960s.



## PART II

### The Papers

The following papers remain close to the varied long-term interests of the participants, even though they proved to be rich vehicles for the seminar discussions. While several of the papers reflect these discussions and there are many diffuse linkages among them, each stands very well on its own. In the absence of any obvious way to unite all the papers, it is nonetheless appropriate to discuss the rationale by which I have grouped them.

Cohen takes up the central debate in elite research between power elite and pluralist positions, shows its fundamental weaknesses, and then transcends it in his discussion of the historic formation of new political elites in an emirate region of northern Nigeria. In framing his ethnographic material, Cohen introduces a notion of normative theory in order to incorporate explicitly the implicit normative base of elite theory in ethnographic research.

Bailey's paper on university administrators is the only one that concerns an elite community within a contemporary bureaucratic setting. Although academia as a formal organization has several unique characteristics, his discussion of the cognitive structure implicit in the

language of a bureaucratic elite offers generalizable points about professionalism as a basic code of elite status in rationalized social orders. The contrast of administrators with academics, who retain an air of ancient privilege, only serves to place in relief the mentality which Bailey describes.

From the perspective of community study research in American society, Greenhouse discusses two contrasting varieties of elite-status attribution in a southern town. Far from being an isolated, hidden part of community life, self-concern with elite status, in its religious and secular forms, Greenhouse shows, is widespread in Hopewell and is a major source of group identity and division in the community. Furthermore, in emphasizing the cultural aspects of elite status attribution, Greenhouse demonstrates how prevalent claims to elite identity can be in mass liberal societies. Finally, her conclusion contains useful observations about cross-cultural variation in elite status attribution.

The papers by the Schneiders trace the formation and decline of the family-organized *civile* elite in rural Sicily against the broader background of changes in the Italian state and world economy. In so doing, they take up a number of important issues in elite theory and research. Their first paper on the nineteenth-century *civile* offers an original discussion of elite demography, an important but underrepresented topic. Their second paper on the fate and aftermath of *civile* dominance in the twentieth century demonstrates how a tightly integrated regional power elite can dissolve during the formation of elites on higher, more inclusive levels of geopolitical organization. Taken together, both papers show the interrelatedness of elite organizations in Sicilian society, and demonstrate the interrelationships between analytically distinguishable processes of elite formation, class formation, and state formation.

The detailed paper by the Rudolphs on oligopolistic competition among bureaucratic lineages in Indian princely states also concerns a case in which an institutional order is dominated by family-organized elites. The Rudolphs' concept of bureaucratic lineage is thus a fusion of the classic Weberian distinction between patrimonialism and rationalized administration. This paper explores the substance of elite politics in a highly structured field of relationships through the apt use of a theory of competition central to neoclassic economics.

The papers by the Schneiders and the Rudolphs demonstrate clearly the importance of social history for ethnographic research on elites in

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complex societies, from the angle of political economy, as well as the need to merge work in archives with first-hand fieldwork which includes considerable oral history. In fact, aside from the social science penchant to meld theory-building and -testing elements into the narrative of a specific case, it is difficult to distinguish the work of the social historian from that of the on-the-scene ethnographer in these papers.

Marcus's paper examines the formation of American (and especially Texan) dynastic families that originate in business fortunes and then take on diffuse patrician functions in their geopolitical environments. The evolution of appropriate instruments in the national legal system and of a role for professional fiduciaries has led to a broadly uniform process nationwide for the institutionalization of family wealth and power, which eventually establish considerable autonomy from the influence of flesh-and-blood family descendants. It is not that family-based elite organization has disappeared in advanced capitalist societies, but rather that such organization has become increasingly corporate, in line with the general trend of rationalization in advanced capitalism. A secondary argument of this paper is that the legally authorized fiduciary management of family fortunes has led to an analogous legitimating ideology for Establishment institutions which are, in effect, the direct philanthropic legacy of dynastic families to the corporate institutional order of twentieth-century American society.

Finally, the paper by Hansen and Parrish is an appropriate concluding piece that covers some of the same areas addressed in the introductory chapters from an alternative perspective. It also offers a conceptual review of issues raised in the preceding papers concerning the interplay of family-based elites and corporate institutions. The authors argue effectively that family and kinship continue to figure importantly in the elite organizations of advanced capitalist states. Originally presented as a set of notes by Hansen in the seminar, the ideas in this paper were an influential stimulus to our discussions.





## Being and Doing

### Competing Concepts of Elite Status in an American Suburb<sup>1</sup>

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#### THE PROBLEM IN ETHNOLOGY

The study of elites in any society, “complex” or not, poses special problems for ethnologists because of the nature of the concept of elite status. The first problem is one of cultural bias: Western society offers a strong emic view of elite status as direct power over others. The emic concept is one of hierarchy and of transaction in rather specific terms: decision-making power, influence, network effectiveness, accumulation of wealth and the power to accumulate wealth, and so on. While influence and wealth may be functions of elite status in particular cultural settings, they cannot constitute an anthropological definition of the term. Restricting the meaning of elite status to economic and/or political power is problematic for two reasons. Either it implies that elites can be found in a limited range of ethnographic settings, that is, in societies with central political institutions, and/or where material wealth is positively valued, or it implies that elites have homologous functions cross-culturally. Both of these implications are undesirable:

the first restricts ethnological inquiry unnecessarily, and the second renders the ethnology of elites circular.

The second problem that elites pose for ethnologists is of a different order. In the form of a question, it is: Is an actual social field to be associated with the concept of elites? Is it a sociological concept? Can individuals be elite, or only groups? Further, must the elite person or persons be conscious of shared interests and strategies arising from elite status; are elites action groups, or merely collectivities? These questions cannot have one answer. In this paper, I argue that elite concepts may exist purely symbolically, or, in different contexts, as sociological entities, and that the criteria for defining elite status must vary accordingly.

This paper, then, has two motives: one methodological and one ethnological. First, I hope to demonstrate that definitions of elite status are considerably and beneficially broadened if they are empirically derived. Second, I offer data from an American setting that suggest at least two competing native concepts of elite status, one based on secular power and the other based on sacredness, or spiritual maturity. These two concepts are fundamentally different, but ultimately related, both structurally and historically. The present analysis emphasizes the positive structural relationships between the two conceptualizations of elite status. My research focused on Baptists, and their perspective comprises the point of departure in the discussion below.

## HOPEWELL

This section and the next present data that were collected as part of a wider study of "Hopewell," Georgia. Hopewell is a suburban town that, at the time of the study (1973-75), was two square miles and held a population of slightly over 4,000 within its corporate limits.<sup>2</sup> The town is twenty miles from a major city and has been partially engulfed by that city's growth since World War II. The contiguous edge of the county of which Hopewell is the seat is indistinguishable from the metropolis, but beyond the town, the country consisted of farms, scrub, and forest.

The data that form the core of this paper are contemporary, but a brief historical sketch is necessary to situate them properly.

Hope County was a rural area for most of its history, profitably engaged in cotton agriculture until the 1930s. The railroad that ran

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the length of Hopewell's Main Street made the town an early subregional commercial center. Hopewell has always been the county seat. Before the Civil War, Hopewell seems to have consisted of three groups: professionals and businessmen in the center of the town, a small number of large-scale agriculturalists in a ring of plantations surrounding Hopewell, and small farmers and manufacturers who lived on the periphery. The small farmers far outnumbered the aristocrats, but the county was gerrymandered in 1858 to give the aristocrats a disproportionate influence on major electoral issues, such as tariffs and secession.<sup>3</sup>

This situation changed temporarily after the Civil War in the first of two major shifts in the county's social organization. As land prices plummeted and taxes rose immediately following the war, the major agriculturalists began to sell off their lands to redeem their debts. The small farmers and manufacturers acquired their land, holding (on the average) a few hundred acres. The former plantation owners continued to own land, but themselves moved into town, expanding the ranks of professionals and businessmen in Hopewell itself. The second shift followed the collapse of cotton farming in the county during the depression of the 1930s, when small farmers in general were in crisis, and the cotton farmers were particularly devastated because of the boll weevil blight. Hopewell's professional and business group remained stable at this point, but the small farmers began to sell their lands. They, too, moved into Hopewell or the surrounding area, and found employment in the city or in new jobs in Hope County spawned by the city's phenomenal growth following World War II.

The division between these groups of farmers and businessmen has several other dimensions. First, the small farmers and businessmen—large agriculturalist groups tended not to intermarry, except for a few strategic alliances. Modern residents speak of two clans in Hopewell existing even today. While that is an exaggeration in anthropological terms, it is an apt metaphor for the group endogamy that genealogical records document. Second, political parties reveal the same split: the outlying small farmers were Populists, while the townspeople were Democrats. Today, the business elite is Republican, and the town and county are Democratic. Finally, and most important for this paper, the small farmers tended to be Baptist, and the townspeople tended to be predominantly Methodist and Presbyterian. In the contemporary community, religious ideology has subsumed these other historical

divisions, but the structure of the two groups' elite ideologies suggests the continued relevance of their historical ties. The discussion below develops this point.

### *Baptists in Hopewell*

The central fact of the Baptist sect of Protestantism as it is expressed in Hopewell is its adherents' belief that only Baptists can attain salvation. Other Christian and non-Christian sects are alike in their destiny: hell awaits even the good-intentioned. Baptists define salvation as the eternal community of Jesus in heaven; they define hell as the absence of God, not as fire and brimstone or a physically punishing place. The uniqueness of Baptist salvation motivates three modes of Baptist life: one active, one passive, and one reflexive. The active mode is "witnessing," spreading the "news" of the Gospel so that other people will have the opportunity to be saved. The passive mode is "living the life of good witness"—setting an example, or teaching, by living according to the Gospel. The reflexive mode is church worship and prayer. Church services are held three times weekly (Sunday morning and Wednesday and Sunday nights), but prayer is not confined to church worship or to church-centered events (e.g., Sunday school, community suppers, and sports events). These three modes of being Baptist require further comment.

The concept of living a life of good witness is important because it establishes the Baptist's faith as a total way of life, a total way of being or existing in society, and as a society apart. Significantly, the "message" of the Gospel does not apply only or primarily to family life or to personal ethnics, but potentially to all human interactions on any scale of activity. Thus, the idea of the community of Jesus is really an image of a society governed by the word of the Scripture; the Bible is widely effective as a facilitator of human action among Baptists. Further, because of the idea of salvation, the "community of Jesus" has more than one temporal aspect: it is the living and historical church community and also the eternal gathering of "Christians" (the Baptists' word for themselves) in Heaven. Finally, the Baptist community, or congregation, is not a territorial community, but a spiritual one that crosscuts other associations. Living a life of good witness is explained primarily in terms of harmony and charity, or, in other terms, moral and material charity. Hopewell's Baptists do not use the courts to

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process disputes, for example (Greenhouse 1982b). Material charity ranges from support of the poor to refraining from pleas for compensation, for example, in auto accidents, in cases of neglected debts, and so on. The Baptists see law courts and welfare as two signs of the deterioration of secular society; they see Christian life as one of forgiveness and sacrifice. Otherwise, the life of good witness does not appear to entail any special interactions; indeed, it is considered a form of service for those Baptists who do not or cannot engage in the active form of their faith, witnessing.

Witnessing, or “spreading the faith,” is analogous to public relations. The Southern Baptist Convention prints numerous tracts (pamphlets and cards) designed to explain the faith to non-Baptists and to invite them to join the church. Witnessing sometimes means distributing these tracts, but that was the least common form so far as I could observe. The prevalent form of witnessing is “visiting,” that is, calling on non-Baptists to invite them to attend Sunday school or to worship. Baptists believe that the word of God is itself compelling, so witnessing does not involve argumentation, only invitation and “testimony,” that is, narratives illustrating the impact of the Christian faith on individual lives. The less-formal church services, held in the evenings, always include a testimony or two. Members of the congregation speak from the pulpit about their “conversion experiences” when they encountered Jesus for the first time, or in a special way that led them to feel that they had been “born again” in their faith. Adult Baptists often reported that an initial conversion experience had been relatively weak, compared to later encounters with Jesus. They conceptualized their own maturity in terms of increasing their understanding of their faith and the power of these subsequent encounters with Jesus. Thus, being a Baptist, or conversion to the Baptist faith from other religions is not a one-time experience, but a repeated one. Each repetition is presumed to deepen the understanding of the believer of the Baptist way of life, and the more mature the individual, the more profound are his spiritual experiences.

Prayer, or the reflexive mode of the Baptist faith, unites the life of good witness with the active forms of witnessing. Prayer, as mentioned above, is not confined to ritual settings, but is a varied mode of thought as well as a diversified type of speech event. Baptists refer to all contemplation as prayer, and, indeed, all forms of private thought as prayer. Private decisions, for example, are usually described as com-

munications from God in response to prayer. Prayer is often silent but always verbal. It may be a solitary dialogue with Jesus, or a conversation over the telephone, or it may occur in any small group, in unison or spontaneously led, as well as in the church setting. Baptists use no prayer books since they believe that all prayerful speech comes from God (thus, the preacher's preparation for sermons includes prayer, but not rehearsals or notes). The Baptists are literal interpreters of the Bible, both Old and New testaments. As mentioned earlier, they see the Bible as the law of the perfect society, as well as the source of private guidance. Devout Baptists read a portion of the Bible daily, and weekly Sunday school (Sunday mornings and afternoons preceding church services) is devoted to Bible study and independent interpretation.<sup>4</sup> By the time they are teenagers, Baptists have a large repertoire of scriptural verses committed to memory, which they use in a variety of ways (for example, in prayer, joking, or dueling).

These three modes of being involve certain implications that are borne out in the Baptist community in Hopewell. Some of these pertain to the structure of the church community, others pertain to the non-Baptist world. I will review these in turn.

The internal organization of the Baptist community is much affected by Baptist ideology, and by the concept of the Christian life described above. The Baptists' concept of the Christian life is of a brief mortal transition between two fixed and ultimately immortal states, one fixed in disorder (the secular world, see below for discussion) and the other fixed in order (Heaven). The individual Baptist celebrates his transitions between these states by baptism (immersion in water) and burial (immersion in the earth), respectively. Collectively, the congregation of Baptists demarcates the transitions by referring to two types of union: during life, union with the family of Christ (the congregation and, more remotely, other Baptists) and after death, reunion with Jesus.<sup>5</sup> Baptism does not take place at birth within a Baptist family, but after the child or young adult has "made his decision" to join the church as an individual. Faith is not inherited, but a product of individual prayer and communication with Jesus. In effect, Baptists see their lives as liminal, in Turner's (1969, 1974) sense.

The effect of the Baptists' view of their own lives is twofold. First, ordinary concerns such as wealth, prestige, and disputing—all of which the Baptists see as obsessions in the non-Baptist world (more below)—are, theoretically, irrelevant because they are earthly concerns, of no

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permanent importance. Second, because material wealth and other “worldly” concerns are irrelevant, the Baptist community is structured on other principles. The scriptural ideas of sacrifice and asceticism reinforce the antimaterialism in the congregation. Baptists have an egalitarian ethos based on the premise that the Word and salvation are available to all, and avoid all forms of interaction that suggest secular hierarchy. This idea will be resumed shortly.

The corollary of the tripartite idea of the community of Jesus, the equality of faith and salvation, and liminality is a reciprocal conceptualization of the non-Baptist world. Interestingly, Hopewell’s Baptists use the word *world* as a euphemism for hell in expletive speech contexts, and, indeed, in the local terms, the non-Baptist world is one sort of hell, although there the absence of God is due to rejection by nonbelievers, while in hell itself God’s absence is inherent. The Baptist image of non-Baptist society is reciprocal on several levels, although this is not to imply that the non-Baptists concur in the self-image. First, Baptists see non-Baptists as an undifferentiated community, which they are not by their own criteria. Baptists differentiate among Christians and non-Christians and among Christian sects only for limited purposes (e.g., discussion of strategies for conversion).

Further, Baptists see non-Baptists as obsessed with material things, conspicuous consumption, status symbols (in the colloquial sense), aggression, contention, and self-interest. In other words, they see the non-Baptist community as highly structured hierarchically, and they see secular power as a gratification and means of hierarchical manipulation. Finally, Baptists see non-Baptists as living lives of pathetic self-delusion, since pleasures of the flesh and purse are temporary, confined as they are to the earthly, mortal realm. To the Baptists, the only true pleasures are the pleasures of prayer and Christian community. In effect, the Baptist image of non-Baptists can be reduced to a paradigm that shows the distinctive qualities of “the world” in the comparative terms that characterize the Baptist perspective:

- :: Baptist:non-Baptist
- :: sacred:profane
- :: saved:damned
- :: heaven:hell
- :: spiritualistic:materialistic
- :: poor:rich
- :: egalitarian:elitist



:: rural:urban  
 :: insiders:outsiders.

Some of these categories refer to the historical situation I sketched out earlier. In prose, the paradigm suggests that Baptists see themselves as products of the authentic (rural) southern, or local, society; that their society is exclusive and implies special knowledge; that they see themselves as relatively poor or inured to poverty; that their true riches are spiritual; that they are unconcerned with earthly (temporary) status markers; and, as already explained, that they are the community of the saved, destined for eternal life in heaven and a sacred community on earth. The non-Baptists are seen as the opposite category in each case, sometimes erroneously. For example, Hopewell's Baptists no longer live in the rural areas, nor are they poor, or even relatively poor in comparison to Methodists and Presbyterians. Further, the paradigm ignores the fact that many of the congregation's members (but not the deacons, who manage the church in secular affairs) are newcomers (nonauthentic) to Hopewell. The paradigm is more accurate historically, but it is its persistence that is significant to this paper. The fact that these categories do not match demographic or ethnographic reality very well increases their significance.

Devout Baptists avoid non-Baptists when they can, except under the controlled circumstances of witnessing. The workplace, school, and the myriad settings of daily life (e.g., the supermarket) are considered unavoidable contexts of interaction. Leisure time in the city, social calls (except to prospects for conversion), and, as already mentioned, the court are examples of avoidable contexts of interaction. Baptists are concerned not to give the appearance of worldliness in speech, dress, or life-style. Decisions are justified in terms of the church, sacred values, a verse of scripture, and so on. Even family relations are not consistently valued more highly than the Christian community. Even adolescents have spiritual lives independent of their parents; a common anxiety among these young people is their parents' damnation and fear of eternal separation after death. The Baptists' ideal is that the church be the center and crucible of family life, not that families be divided. In general, though, the Baptists' concept of the non-Baptist world divides them from it.

The structure and organization of the Baptist community can now be examined more specifically. The church is organized by two egal-

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itarian principles. One is the age-grade. All church activities except worship are organized into peer groups. The college-age group is the exception to the parallel segregation by marital status, since members remain in the college-age group until they marry, and return there (very rarely) after divorce (but, significantly, not after widowhood). The groups are not segregated by sex, although there are separate activities for the Sisterhood and Brotherhood of the church, which are not age-graded. Age structures personal interactions outside the church, as well. For example, since I was unmarried at the time of my research in Hopewell, I was encouraged to find peer activity among the “college and career group,” and found that my conversations with older church members were often erroneously construed either as a desire for counsel, or as a sign of interest in conversion.

Older church members use sibling terms (plus surnames) as terms of address: all men are “brother”; all women are “sister” except for mothers and mothers-in-law. “Father” is reserved for God; the preacher is called “brother.” Younger church members do not follow this traditional usage. The use of kin terms reiterates the idea that church members are equally children of God and alike in their sibling status.

The other principle that structures the church is the concept of spiritual maturity, for which age-grading provides the vocabulary, but not the substance. The new convert to Baptist Christianity, or the Baptist who has renewed his conversion, is referred to as a “born-again Christian.” The allusion is felicitous, since the new Christian’s faith is believed to be fragile and vulnerable to destruction, as is the life of a new-born infant. As a new Christian experiences his faith through the communal life of the church, his commitment presumably strengthens. Spiritual strength enables individuals to resist the temptations of the world: quarreling, lying, materialism, promiscuity, and so on. Baptists do not drink alcohol. Alcohol is seen as a particularly strong temptation to young people, who are encouraged to stay away from the city (Hope County was dry during the period of my research). True spiritual maturity is not a function of age, but of spiritual age, that is, experience in faith, experience in turning away from “the world” as it is described in the paradigm above and in the next section. A young person may be more spiritually mature than his parents. This theme is often sounded when a young child has died. Ideally, perhaps, the structural principle of spiritual maturity parallels the organizational

principle of age, but in fact they crosscut.<sup>6</sup> Significantly, spiritual maturity does not depend on ritual knowledge either, since the Baptist church in Hopewell involves minimal ritual of an esoteric sort.

The Hopewell Baptists' concept of elite status stems directly from the two principles of age and spirituality, as it combines them. Church members are conscious of their own growing maturity, or of their struggle for maturity, but they are also aware of the effect of maturity in others. Most criteria of spirituality are in-dwelling—a perfect life of good witness, a practiced serenity derived from devotion, perfection in moral and material charity, and persuasiveness of counsel. Each of these characteristics assumes and subsumes a thorough knowledge of scripture and insightful, creative interpretation. In the affairs of the world, the church's elite is not so much withdrawn, but untroubled, untempted. Because of this last criterion, the concept of elite status also implies advanced or advancing age: only an older person can have experienced all the temptations of the world and all of its trials.

That the Baptist concept of elites should entail the dual aspects of spiritual experience and worldly experience is particularly significant. It implies that it is not the world that is dangerous, but the particular relationship between the world and a spiritually unformed Christian. In symbolic terms, the Baptist faith purifies the world's pollution by purifying individuals, as if purity and pollution were entities that rival each other for control of the human soul. More pollution leaves less room for purity, and the triumph of maturity is the conquest of pollution through pure spirituality. Importantly, the Baptists' quest to purify the world in advance of Judgment Day is expressed through individual, inner struggle, not through the institutional order. To my knowledge, Baptists in Hopewell never speak in terms of "taking over" the instruments of the material world and converting them to spiritual uses. Their rejection of public institutions is inherent in their belief in God's authority; it is not a commentary on those institutions' actual performance.

As long as the world exists, a Baptist elite will exist in relation to it within the church community. When the world ceases to exist (after Judgment), so will the elite. The elite is not "more saved" than the rest of the congregation, for example. Heaven is not compartmentalized according to access to Jesus. The elite has no reward that derives from the faith itself (in etic terms), a fact that underlies its contingent aspect.

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Because the nature of the concept of elite status is symbolic and relational, there is no coherent elite group that corresponds to it. Baptists might not agree on the question of which individuals are the most mature in their spirituality, but the group as a whole is never relevant simultaneously. The question is relevant as a sociological matter only under very narrow circumstances, for example, seeking advice. Then, the elite are visible singly and in relative terms: they are always older, and most often women. (Men who work are continually engaged with the world and have a more difficult time shedding it inwardly.) In general, however, the Baptists' elite do not have sociological functions as a group. They do not manage the church's secular affairs, as I have said; that business is in the hands of the deacons. They do not administer the church's sacred affairs; that is the preacher's role. They are heavily involved in the church's "extra-curricular" activities, for example, Sunday school teaching and coordinating age-group events in the evenings when services are not held, sporting events for young men, and the daily nursery school, but service to the church is not reserved for the spiritually mature. Such service is itself considered redeeming and maturing.

The function of the elite is conceptual, and is particularly important in the continual dialectics of the quest for a sacred life in a secular world. As I mentioned in the introduction to this section, contemporary Baptists in Hopewell are indistinguishable from non-Baptists on every visible dimension: they include no disproportion of poor, unemployed, or disadvantaged. Their ranch houses and split levels are as well kept and well furnished as the non-Baptists', and their jobs are just as high paying. Thus, Baptist men, for example, participate in exactly the same reward structure as the non-Baptist men, and their economic constraints are identical. The difference is in the way in which Baptists value their material situation.

In this suburb whose population is largely upwardly mobile financially, the pull of material benefits and of advancement constitutes a real contradiction that manifests itself as inner conflict. In order to resolve the contradiction between their spirituality and their materialism, Baptists tend to redefine the material aspect of their success. Promotion, for example, is not discussed so much in terms of reward for merit, but as a God-given opportunity for greater service through personal responsibility. Education is seen in terms of training for service, not for personal satisfaction or for the instrumentalities of a higher

degree in the job market. Wealth is seen as an opportunity for tithing and charity, not as an end in itself. Baptists in Hopewell are successful in the secular world, but their very success creates anxiety that they are insufficiently spiritual. Thus the invitation of Christ through the Gospel and through the community of the church is continually relevant even to devout Christians; it must be continually renewed because the world persistently beckons with its rival order.

In this context, the Baptists' concept of the spiritually mature elite is at one end of a symbolic spectrum that opposes, at the other end, the material world in which they are involved daily. The spiritually mature are able to resolve the inner conflict that derives from the conjunction of the sacred and the profane, and are able to live lives of perfect witness in a world of stress and distraction. Thus, it is not important that there is not one group of people who matches the description of the mature Christian, because the concept of Baptist Christianity is not one that inheres in the institutional or sociological order, as I have said. It is a symbolic elite, and as such inheres in the Baptists' understanding of their own faith. The idea of mature spirituality is a standard by which Baptists can measure the effect of their participation in the secular world on their own spirituality, and on their own spirituality in relation to that of others.

The symbolic elite further allows Baptists to compartmentalize (Pitt-Rivers 1967) the secular world from their sacred Christian community. Although the settings of the workplace and the city produce ideological contradictions, the concept of the elite facilitates their dissociation from life within the church. As I have said, the church offers believers a total identity, and the terms from the paradigm described above are the images with which Baptists conceptualize their contingent identity (contingent in relation to their own elite and the secular world). Their image of themselves as rural, for example, is important because it symbolically opposes urban life. Its origin may have been Hopewell's agrarian past, but now it encodes "not-city." Thus, although Baptists work in the same settings as non-Baptists, their rural self-image permits them to dissociate their own identities from the urban workplace. They do not so much think of themselves as farmers, but as being inwardly uninvolved with the city and its corruptions. Importantly, the rural image is not a literal one.

Compartmentalization has two principal effects in addition to, or as a consequence of, the Baptists' symbolic dissociation from worldly

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images. First, Baptists expect conflict from nonbelievers, partly because their image of non-Baptists is of amoral, quasi-socialized beings, but also because they realize that non-Baptists have different priorities and make different choices. When conflict does occur, Baptists respond only by reaffirming their negative image of the secular world. Conflict does not provoke substantive response. Compartmentalization thus enables Baptists to tolerate high levels of conflict in the outside world. (Within the church community, conflict is emically redefined as spiritual immaturity and is handled nonadversarially. See Greenhouse 1982a.)

The second effect of compartmentalization is in the Baptists' response to change. Although the Baptists see themselves as oases in the urban desert, the city imposes itself on Hopewell residents, Baptists or not, in many ways. Except for a few square blocks in the center of town that were recently designated a national historical district, the town is vastly changed from even a few years ago. Its population has increased many times since 1960. In the early 1960s children could walk barefoot on a dirt road alongside grazing cows, under a canopy of pecan trees, on what is now a six-lane, neon-decorated strip feeding into the national highway system. The changes have also brought in thousands of newcomers, and, consequently, acres of new subdivisions and miles of new streets, dividing the old Hopewell neighborhoods and consuming former farmlands. The Baptists, too, live in the new subdivisions, and their community can tolerate dispersal because, as I have said, their community is not a territorial one. The church has grown as newcomers join, but the new arrivals and converts do not soften the boundary between Baptists and non-Baptists. City people who join the faith simply move from one side of the paradigm to the other, another indication of its purely symbolic nature. The transformation of the physical face of Hopewell has not placed any particular external stress on Baptists. They do not patronize a specific set of businesses, for example, nor do they seek to remain in their old neighborhoods. The social nexus in which Baptists live and find meaning has not been altered by the progress of urbanization because it does not depend on a specific sociological or institutional arrangement. Baptists perceive and regret the changes to their town, but these regrets are largely aesthetic. Because the Baptists compartmentalize the secular world from their sacred community, the symbolic level on which that community exists is not threatened by these rapid changes at the

sociological level. This is one of the points on which non-Baptists can be distinguished most easily from Baptists, as will be explained in the following section.

*Hopewell's Business and Professional Networks*

The people who manage the retail establishments along Hopewell's Main Street, provide services (e.g., doctors and lawyers), and administer the public institutions (e.g., judges, clerks, etc.), comprise Hopewell's central business and professional network. There are many other businessmen in Hopewell and in Hope County, but they are outside of the network I describe in this section. Unlike the church members just described, this group is a network, not a community. Their association involves only a partial identity. Their roles as storekeepers or bankers do not constitute a "way of life," but only a shared set of partial interests and constraints.

As I outlined in the brief historical sketch, the businessmen and professionals (hereafter simply "businessmen") were once a tightly knit group. In fact, as late as the 1920s they were all related either by marriage or by sibling and first-cousin relationships. That situation has changed—has had to change—owing to the expansion of the nearby city's business sector into the surrounding suburbs. The businessmen had to be able to absorb newcomers, or more accurately, had to be able to accommodate the influx of greater wealth and larger-scale commercial activity by urban newcomers. The local businessmen now include many newcomers. Here is a further differentiating feature between Baptists and the businessmen: while the Baptists' symbolic community protected them from exogenous changes in their pattern of social relations, the businessmen have responded to change by altering and expanding their patterns of local interaction to include the metropolis and newcomers to Hopewell. This fact has bearing on the local businessmen's concept of elite status.

Since the influx of newcomers, the business network is only partially autochthonous, giving rise to a double "constituency." Janus-like, the businessmen must look both to the city and to Hopewell: to the city for the associations that will expand their credit, furnish their supplies, and tie them into the southern regional markets, and to Hopewell and Hope County for their clients and customers, as well as for their social relationships. They consider themselves mediators between the city

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and Hopewell economically, politically, and socially, and, in a very real sense, they are. For the Baptists, liminality is a symbolic concept that imposes particular contradictions on believers which, as we have seen, they resolve by means of their abstract concept of elite status. For the businessmen, their mediational status poses particular problems in the sociological realm, which they resolve with a sociological concept of elite status. These two concepts of elite status are counterparts, and form one conceptual whole (see below).

The central sociological dilemma that the businessmen face is how to resolve their crosscutting identifications. First, the businessmen must maintain effective business relationships within Hopewell because of their shared interests. The business sector is too small to risk overt conflict, for example. My research did not include an investigation of the economic ties among businesses, but they do cooperate in noncommercial ventures, for example, in an active Chamber of Commerce dedicated to the expansion of Hope County business opportunity, in zoning, and in the delivery of social services to the county. These cooperative ties crosscut the groups of natives and newcomers in the business network, who must also be concerned with their wider constituency. The natives, for example, are concerned with cultivating effective ties in the urban business community, for the reasons that I have explained. The newcomers, who are predominantly from the city, are concerned with maintaining their legitimacy and fostering their assimilation in Hopewell. Thus, their separate interests foster mutually dependent interrelationships in the wider social sphere beyond their businesses.

There appear to be at least two settings where the integration of the two segments (native and newcomer) is nurtured: the country club and the historical society. There may be more than two, but in any case the Methodist and Presbyterian churches do not appear to be as important as places of interaction. The country club was only a few years old during the period of my research, and its modern building is on one edge of Hopewell in the unincorporated part of Hope County, near Hopewell's luxury-housing subdivision. Its facilities include a restaurant, meeting rooms, large banquet facilities, a golf course, and tennis courts. The country club enjoys special privileges with the county police, since liquor is served and consumed there in violation of the local law. It is a popular place for private entertaining and business lunches since, until a motel was built in 1975, it was the



only local restaurant with what might be called a comfortable urban atmosphere (the town's other restaurants include fast food and "country food" establishments, which serve no alcohol and provide service too quick for conversation). Its image among the town's Baptists is one of a sinful, degrading place (because of the alcohol and dancing), where businessmen are said to "make deals" and women flaunt their finery.

The historical society was founded by a newcomer in 1972, shortly after Hopewell's first influx of new commercial development and the completion of the interstate that cuts across the county. The historical society's general purpose is to discover and preserve the oral, written, and architectural history of the town, and its numerous projects included two renovations for use as museums, and compilation of a book of local genealogies. Each of these tasks required the mobilization of considerable personnel, funds, and services from both Hopewell and the city. Its most active members were the women in the business network: wives of businessmen and the very few women who also held positions on Main Street. Men's functions were primarily to serve as brokers in arranging assistance for the society's projects. Active members were fairly continuously involved, sometimes on a daily basis. Their involvement was intellectual but also deeply emotional; disputes were deeply felt and loyalties intensely expressed.

The historical society serves a double function: one is its manifest function of historical preservation and documentation, and the other is its role as a locus for satisfying the crosscutting and potentially contradictory needs of both the newcomers and the natives. I believe that this second function is at least as important as the first, and further, that this is why both natives and nonnatives are equally enthusiastic, and why the group's activities are so vested with emotion. Finally, the fact that the devout Baptists do not participate in the historical society's activities even though their pedigree in Hopewell is just as well established reflects their awareness of the society's business-related functions, as well as the fact that their voluntary associations do not centrally include non-Baptists. In other words, history has the capacity of neutralizing the differences between natives and newcomers, but not the differences between the spiritual Baptists and what they see as the materialistic world.

History, through the historical society, has a neutralizing effect because both groups desire and allow that it be so. By working for the historical society, newcomers show their willingness to participate in

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and value Hopewell's history, and, implicitly, show that they do not desire to transform Hopewell's society nor to condescend to it, but only to be engaged in it. For their part, the natives welcome the historical society for the opportunity it gives them to establish social ties to the urban business and political networks. In broader terms, involvement in the historical society gives the newcomers legitimacy in Hopewell, and the natives access to the city. In other contexts, history separates newcomers from natives, and newcomers never lose their stranger status completely. One person mentioned casually that a local judge was new to town, although his parents had settled there in 1914.

The businessmen's concept of elite status stems directly from their sociological position as mediators, and from the structure of the dilemma (crosscutting identifications) in which their position places them. Newcomers and natives share the same elite concept, although they relate to it differently. For the newcomers, it is an emblem of contemporary identification with Hopewell; for the natives, it asserts their authenticity and historical precedence. For both groups, the concept of elite status reflects their consciousness of the city as a separate alien place and of the resulting relativities. The businessmen's concept of elite status also produces a paradigm of symbolic images:

- :: Hopewell:city
- :: traditional:nontraditional
- :: conservative:progressive
- :: safe:dangerous
- :: poorer:richer
- :: egalitarian:elitist
- :: rural:urban
- :: insiders:outsiders.

The terms of the paradigm reflect the businessmen's shared valuations of their relatively rural situations; for them, too, Hopewell is "rural" only in the contingent sense of "not-city." Their claim to tradition along with their invocation of their collective, quasi-mythicized, rural past suggests a claim to authentic social structure, as opposed to the city's, which is newer. As I have said, though, the businessmen do seek and accommodate readily to social change. In some contexts, "authenticity" implies a valuation of southernness over northernness, since the city is known as being a "Yankee city built with Yankee money," in the words of one businessman's wife in Hopewell. Hope-

well is not a poor community, as I have already said, although there are fewer opportunities for and signs of conspicuous consumption than in the city. Egalitarianism refers to the local businessmen's mutual assimilation of newcomers and natives, or in other terms, city and country folk. Urban society is seen as elitist because it is closed to rural styles and images. Hopewell businessmen value conservatism in two senses: in the literal sense of preserving the past through the historical society, and in the sense of political conservatism. For example, the same group that founded the historical society also founded the Hope County Republican Party. Safety and danger refer to physical safety in Hopewell; while crime, particularly juvenile crime, is not unknown in Hopewell County, it is a physically safe place compared to the city. Finally, Hopewell's businessmen see themselves as belonging, which, newcomers or natives, they do when compared to outsiders. The newcomers "belong" in Hopewell only in this contingent sense which encodes "not-city." By sharing the paradigm and its implied shared relationship to the city, newcomers and natives achieve the unity they seek. Thus, the paradigm is not meant to describe empirical reality, but, as in the Baptist case, to establish positive, contingent symbolizations of sociological categories that have meaning in the social context of the town's businessmen. That context, once again, is their mediational position and their reciprocal need to submerge their crosscutting identifications in convergent interests and shared symbolic associations.

Unlike the Baptists, for whom the concept of elite status did not describe a particular set of people, the businessmen's concept necessarily relates to a particular subgroup with a correspondingly significant social role. These are two, and possibly three, families that are powerful in terms of their central positions in very wide friendship and instrumental networks (Wolf 1966). They are, incidentally, wealthy, but they are not the only wealthy families in town, nor the wealthiest. Wealth may be a function of elite status, but it is not a criterion. More important, it is not their wealth that makes them elite, but their ability to mobilize urban and local resources very quickly for the sake of the community. Two of the families participate intensively—more than any others—in the historical society through their female members. One of these families moved to Hopewell recently from the city; the other was native to Hope and neighboring counties. Other families

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are elite in corresponding degrees, and through them and their associations, the businessmen are able to continue to resolve their structural conflict, both on the sociological level of actual interaction, and on the symbolic level in terms of the paradigm above. Hopewell's businessmen are able to respond to their own increasing urbanization and rapid social change without sacrificing their carefully constructed symbolic identity. This identity helps preclude disruptive conflict from dividing newcomers from natives.

### BEING AND DOING: COMPETITION OR DUALITY?

The question of the interrelationships between the Baptists' and businessmen's concepts of elite status is a crucial one, since, by pairing them in the presentation of data, I implicitly suggest that they should be paired analytically. I have already said, for example, that the Baptists' view of "the world," epitomized by the businessmen, is not reciprocated; that is, the businessmen do not see themselves as profane and the Baptists as holy. The relationship is less direct but more interesting than simple reciprocity. I have already attempted to demonstrate that the two concepts of elite status are contingent ones: for the Baptists, that concept is contingent on the symbolic distinction between the spirituality of the church community and the perceived materialism of the non-Baptists. For the businessmen, their concept is contingent on their perception of sociological differences between themselves and the city's people. In both cases, the position of the symbolizing group is mediational: the Baptists perceive themselves as living in a liminal state, and the businessmen perceive themselves as mediating between the city and Hopewell. Further, these mediational positions pose members of both groups with a specific structural conflict that gives rise in the case of the Baptists to ideological contradictions ("Be in the world but not of it") and among businessmen to sociological contradictions (the need to maintain support in both the city and Hopewell). The concept of elite status in both cases resolves the contradictions. Among the Baptists, the elite was defined in spiritual terms, and among businessmen, the elite was defined in sociological terms. Correspondingly, the Baptist concept of elite status does not match a subset of specific individuals, but among the businessmen, it does and must, in order

to resolve the sociological dilemma in which the businessmen currently find themselves. This has been the argument so far. Now, I will complete my argument first by showing that these dual concepts exist in relation to each other, and second that they compete, or are mutually exclusive, at the ideational level.

First, it is significant that neither concept of elite status is expressed in group-specific terms. For example, the Baptist concept does not entail arcane ritual knowledge of any kind, nor a particular type of conversion experience. Similarly, the business concept does not require a certain type of occupation, nor a particular level of wealth. In the Baptist case, it is not important that the elite concept be realized sociologically at all in an absolute sense. In the businessmen's case, while it is true that blue-collar workers and poor people are not considered elite, this fact is a product of other factors (e.g., network effectiveness), not the result of some absolute criterion. In fact, a comparison of the two paradigms shows them to be essentially the same, except that the Baptists seek the ultimate end of salvation in a sacred community, and businessmen seek the ultimate reward of bilateral community support. Otherwise, the terms of the paradigmatic relationships, and the valuations that both groups place on them (the first element), are the same. I believe that the reason for the parallels is that the source of the paradigms is neither Baptist theology nor business, but something more general. For want of a better term, I call this generality "American culture."

Second, the Baptists and the businessmen have Hopewell in common, although they relate to the idea of Hopewell differently. They share its history and its changes, although they have had different roles in Hope County's urbanization. The valuation of the image of rural poor, of cultural authenticity, and of democratic virtue has historical relevance for both groups. Again, although the two groups make different use of these images, they both invoke their local history and, in wider terms, their identity as southerners in their symbolizations of themselves as Baptists or businessmen.

Third, the paradigms of each group are occasionally and temporarily incorporated by the other. For Baptists, for example, the conversion of a well-educated, urban non-Baptist is an especially joyous occasion. Secular elite status enhances the intensity of the conversion for the individual. It is an intensity that flashes and quickly fades, as the

moment of transition from the damned to the saved is itself ephemeral. The Baptists already believe that their faith is inherently compelling, as I have explained, but a conversion from the heart of the “other side” strengthens the conviction of the faithful exactly because it appears to reaffirm that one can be successful in the world and yet not be ruled by earthly passions. Similarly, the businessmen seem particularly to value participation by devoutly religious individuals (not only Baptists). Religious fervor is not a criterion for elite status, but it enhances the value of that individual’s association, at least at the outset. The high value placed on these symbolic crossovers has at least two explanations. First, since each group is aware of the image that the other holds of it, crossover is known to have direct meaning (vindication) in the reciprocal group. A businessman’s conversion “shows the world” that the Baptist faith is meaningful “even” in the secular world. A devout person in the historical society shows the Baptists that not all secular affairs are profane. Second, crossover implies some sacrifice, which is valued in itself. A businessman is believed to sacrifice material wealth and personal advancement by joining the Baptist church (although, as we have seen, he does not). A devout person involved in secular affairs risks sacrificing his salvation, or at least his serenity. Sacrifice is itself valued highly by both groups.

Each group’s consciousness of the other “system,” so to speak, suggests their conceptual complementarity. This leads to my final argument, that the two concepts of elite status are not two that just happen to coexist in contemporary Hopewell, but two that exist in the form they do because of each other. Again, there are three points.

First, I have already said that some of the images in the paradigms held by Baptists and businessmen are codes in the manner of  $x = \text{not-}y$ , where  $x$  is general and  $y$  is specific, for example, “country” = “not-city.” Further, I have already shown that for Hopewell’s Baptists, the businessmen epitomize the profane non-Baptists; however, there are many groups (e.g., criminals) whom the Baptists might posit as their counterparts. Their choice of the businessmen reflects Hopewell’s history, which I outlined briefly above, but more centrally reflects the fact that their daily lives are thoroughly enmeshed in the business world. They are, in fact, “of” the business world in the sociological sense, and it is important that they control their relationship to it symbolically.

The businessmen's claim to Baptist symbols is more obscure. Earlier, I argued that the businessmen's paradigm existed in reference to the city. Am I now not reversing that argument to claim that the businessmen and Baptists conceptualize status in reference to each other? The fact is that these two arguments are the same, not contradictory. First, it is important to remember that the Baptists' symbols are not their own, but symbols that derive from experiences that all of Hopewell's non-Baptists share. Second, I have also already explained that the basic contradiction for the businessmen is in simultaneously belonging and not belonging in Hopewell. Both natives and newcomers share this contradiction, since for natives it is expressed in the contradiction of belonging but focusing outside the community (on the city), and for the newcomers in not belonging, but focusing within the community. The businessmen use the same symbolic images as the Baptists not only because they are available, but because the Baptists use them, and because Baptists dominate the South. In Georgia and the South generally (apart from Hopewell), Baptists enjoy a hegemony based on their numerical majority and their powerful political influence. Georgia's governors, for example, have been Baptist with only one or two exceptions, and the many dry towns and counties throughout the South are an index of the Baptists' influence. Hopewell's businessmen essentially lay claim to the symbolic identifications of the local Baptists because they certify the status of belonging, not only to the South, but to Hopewell.

Thus, to the Baptists, businessmen = non-Baptists. To the businessmen, Baptists = nonbusinessmen. These equations are not reciprocal in spite of their apparent symmetry, since the equations distribute symbols, but not the content of symbols. As I suggested earlier when discussing the significance of symbolic crossover, the dichotomy in both cases is infused with both righteousness and regret. Both groups identify themselves with deeply held conviction, and both regret that their own identification does not subsume the other. For the Baptists, subsuming the business world would mean having purified it, ending the ideological contradiction of suburban life. For the businessmen, subsuming the Baptists would mean resolving the sociological contradictions of crosscutting identifications.

Second, since each group identifies itself in terms of the symbolic negation of the other, then the two elite paradigms that until now have been discussed separately are more properly merged.<sup>7</sup>

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Baptist:non-Baptist	Hopewell:city
:: sacred:profane	:: traditional:nontraditional
:: heaven:hell	:: conservative:progressive
:: saved:damned	:: safe:dangerous
:: spiritualistic:materialistic	
	:: poor:rich
	:: egalitarian:elitist
	:: rural:urban
	:: insiders:outsiders

In this two-headed paradigm, both Baptists and businessmen can measure their relationship to both their own group and the other simultaneously and in terms of the same images. The ultimate functions of the paradigmatic concept of elite status is, first, to bifurcate the social context, and second, to indicate degrees of mutual participation. As I explained under the previous point, both groups have an interest in measuring their mutual involvement. Their shared interest means that they compete for the monopoly of the bottom half of the new paradigm. Their desire to subsume the other symbolically also means that they threaten each other symbolically. This threat is not an overt one, but an integral part of their self-conceptualization.

The third and final point in this section is counterevidence available from Baptist communities. Baptists in nonplural situations, in which they do not perceive themselves to mediate between heaven and the business world, appear to employ a very different set of symbolic images to express their ideology. Certainly, the Southern Baptist Convention does not assume the anxious stance that Hopewell's Baptists do vis-à-vis the secular community (see, for example, Hill 1966 and Eighmy 1972). In towns where Baptists predominate and control the secular institutions, they do not identify their ideology as being in opposition to them (see, for example, Bryant 1981). This counterevidence does not compel the conclusion that Hopewell's Baptists' ideology is partly a function of their interaction with the non-Baptist community, epitomized by businessmen, but it does suggest that Baptist ideology is flexible in terms of the images available for its expression. It also justifies our concern with why the Baptists in Hopewell choose the particular images that they do, and why the businessmen select the same ones.

The title of this paper refers to "being" and "doing" as two modes



of elite-status conceptualization. Now perhaps it is clear that “being” refers to the Baptists’ concept of elite status as complete spiritual maturity. Baptist identity involves a total engagement of the self; it is, in fact, a mode of being. The businessmen’s concept of elite status is based more on a mode of action, a way of “doing” business. It is a partial identification and has relevance in the sociological realm. Finally, I have attempted to demonstrate that neither conceptualization can be understood without reference to the other but that together, they form a symbolic system that enables Baptists and businessmen to interpret their similarities and differences on the variety of levels on which they interact.

## CONCLUSIONS

The foregoing discussion yields several conclusions about the problem of studying elites in complex, pluralistic situations, and, finally, in the United States.

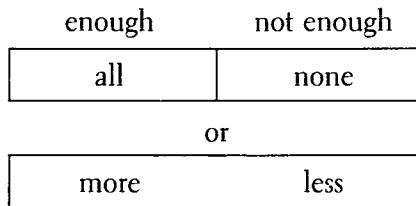
First, folk conceptualizations of elite status are not necessarily descriptive, but prescriptive. As this case study suggests, concepts of elite status constitute criteria of eligibility. The idiom of elite status refers to specific elements of the sociocultural context in which elite status is relevant. This means that elites are not sociological entities a priori, with absolute characteristics. In Hopewell, for example, both concepts of elite status were relational, that is, contingent on the presence of another group. The particular valuations that form a concept of elite status vary culturally, but that relative aspect is necessarily present. Thus, concepts of elite status can be used to examine other aspects of social classification, power, social structure, and so forth, because they are, first and foremost, statements about relationships.

Second, if concepts of elite status are statements about relationships, it is important to consider what they reveal about those relationships. Primarily, they suggest that some forms of social relationships are valued over others. In Hopewell, the question of how relationships acquire value emerges as an important dimension of the study of elites. In both the Baptist and business groups, concepts of elite status satisfy each group’s particular dilemma. Among Baptists, the dilemma is that of achieving and maintaining a state of salvation (sacredness) in a secular, profane world. The concept of elite status answers that problem with imagery that places Christians “in the world but not of it,” that

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is, by reducing the contradiction to a paradox. Among businessmen, the dilemma is that of being simultaneously of the city and of the country. Their concept of elites, too, reduces the contradiction to a paradox by means of involvement in both realms. In both cases, the concept of elite status is mediational: the imagery that articulated the concept united the important elements from both otherwise-conflicting sectors. In elites, nonelites find their problems resolved—if only certain problems, and if only temporarily. Elite concepts and elite groups are vulnerable to collapse as the structures that generate them change.

Any change whose prizes (e.g., satisfaction) are in short supply can be divided into two groups: those who have enough or relatively more of the good, and those who have none or relatively less. Depending on the nature of the good in question, and its accessibility, these two groups may be mutually exclusive or they may form a bipolar continuum:



Salvation, for example, separates two groups absolutely—no one is “more saved” than anyone else, and one cannot be “a little bit saved.” On the other hand, businessmen may be more or less successful; success cannot be measured along such absolute criteria. Concepts of elite status mediate these oppositions, representing, as they do, access to the prize. Those whose elite concept it is appear to think of it in terms (images) of access against odds: the businessman who is devout (to the Baptists), or the city supporter of the historical society (to the businessmen). Thus, it is clear why elites are ultimately conceptualized in the form of relationships: they are brokers. What they broker may be tangible or intangible (clients or salvation, for example). While the imagery of eliteness involves access to some good, the means and pattern of distribution are not specified.

If these general statements are true, then it is crucial to consider what or who controls the framework that elites iterate. While the answer to that question lies beyond this paper, the data presented here do

suggest that control is an important historical issue. If (or perhaps when) Hopewell is finally incorporated into the city, the rural imagery involved in the concept of elite status will no longer be salient. If everyone were Baptist (as in the communities studied by Batteau [1979] and Bryant [1981]), the contradiction of material success would not be so pressing, and so forth; any specific imagery implies the contingencies of its own demise. Thus, projecting beyond the scope of this discussion, it would seem fair to say that the primary task of elite groups is to maintain themselves by controlling the social system that makes their own imagery compelling. Those groups who cannot exercise such control collapse. Using Gluckman's (1965) terms in this context: rebellions occur when elite symbols do not change, but when human counterparts no longer satisfy them; revolutions change the imagery of elite status in whole or in part. Asceticism is the counterpart to revolution in that it denies the salience of the system that generates elites without positively substituting another for it.

Further, the notion that elites are conceived as brokers helps explain some of the apparent contradictions in the self-presentation of elites: wealthy businessmen becoming valued church members, a Western education for an African elite (see Cohen, this volume). These are not contradictions, but advertisements for the individual's ability to straddle both sides of the salient boundary between sufficiency and deprivation. Elites must show themselves to be capable of operating successfully in the domain where their services are desired or required.

Finally, relations among elites are more easily understood if they are perceived in terms of their capability as contrasted with their power, which has to do with other considerations. Some individuals or groups viewed as elite by their constituents broker more important prizes than others, either in terms of their importance for survival (cultural or physical) or their durability. Elites require other elites, on whom their own maintenance depends. These relationships can surely be examined sociologically and historically, but important aspects of their relationships can be clarified by examining the cultural contingencies of their generative concepts. An elite that monopolizes its own prizes is not vulnerable so long as there is a demand for them; however, an elite group may or may not be able to manipulate demand effectively.

The corollary to the point that elites can be understood in terms of their capacity to "deliver" symbolically is that in any population, except the most confined, several conceptions of elite status are likely to exist,

and they may or may not be consistent. Put simply, people need many things: goods, services, consolation, and so forth. A system of elite conceptualizations can tolerate contradictions so long as needs do not co-occur. Elite hierarchies, then, can be understood not only in terms of the relationships between elites, but also in terms of the priorities of their constituents. In the present case, for example, the Baptist men involved in the business world are surely not oblivious to other conceptualizations of elite status nor devoid of them; however, they assert their own sacralizing concept as primary. Here we return to the final point of the ethnographic discussion; through their concepts of elite status, people can measure and interpret their relationships with members of groups they perceive as "other."

Third, since concepts of elite status are contingent in the ways discussed above, the terms *etic* and *emic* lose some of their sharpness. If a power elite is to be the basic etic model, then the question of how power accrues to that particular group remains. The discussion of the Hopewell data suggests that study of power elites can be clarified by an examination of elite concepts that do not generate power. The Baptist elite, for example, is not powerful in any secular sense, but it nevertheless illuminates the power of the businessmen in some contexts.

Finally, the structure of the problem of elite status classification in America may be understood in the broader context of cross-cultural research. Comparisons generally considered to be far-fetched may not be so remote after all. Indian castes are an outstanding example (see Warner 1962), and there are others. For example, Jane Collier's study of Zinacantec (Maya) conflict resolution develops a tripartite model of elite status based on age, secular power, and supernatural power (1973: 85). A prerequisite for cross-cultural comparisons is restoring some concept of culture to the anthropology of the United States. A cultural approach—even where the culture is, paradoxically, relatively uncharted—raises the possibility of understanding American life in a global context.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper and its author were the beneficiaries of the attentive comment and criticism of each of the participants in the Advanced Seminar on Elites in Complex Societies. While I have not been able to pursue all the avenues

suggested at the conference—nor, I fear, met all the criticisms—the essay represents an effort to respond to the discussion of that week. In addition to the seminar participants, the following people were kind enough to read and comment on the paper: Eugene Galbraith, the late Klaus-Freidrich Koch, Dennis McGilvray, and Susanne Siskel. Dan Segal contributed with research assistance, and Barbara Donnell and Denise Everhart typed the manuscripts. I am deeply grateful to each of these people.

## NOTES

1. The data from Hopewell on which this paper is based were collected between 1973 and 1975 during research supported by a training grant from NIMH, through the Department of Anthropology at Harvard University. A short field visit in 1980 was funded by the College of Arts and Sciences, Cornell University. Hopewell and Hope County are pseudonyms.

2. The vast majority of Hopewell's population is white (98 percent in the 1970 census). Blacks and whites have a thin, highly controlled interface in Hopewell that I was not able to penetrate except very superficially. Thus, while there is a black congregation of Baptists in Hopewell, there are no blacks in the church I describe. There are no black businessmen, to my knowledge. Thus, this paper deals only with Hopewell's white population.

3. For a discussion of the evolution of Georgia's political parties, see Phillips 1968.

4. Local Baptists reject the Catholic religion as a route to salvation on the grounds that Catholics have the Bible interpreted for them by priests, and thus are precluded from independent study and, hence, spiritual maturity.

5. Conviction is a stage in the transformation of a non-Baptist into a Baptist. An individual who has heard about the Gospel through witnessing and who is receptive to it is called a "prospect." When a prospect begins to grapple personally with the idea of conversion, he is said to be "under conviction," a state that is apparently simultaneously tormenting and joyous, since it implies direct dialogue with the Holy Spirit. When conviction ends successfully, the prospect is said to have returned to the side of the Devil.

6. An indication of the ideal relationship between biological and spiritual age is the differential spiritual status accorded persons who have divorced and persons who are widowed. Divorcées are "demoted" to the singles group; widows remain with the adults. Divorce, being an act of will, reflects a loss of spiritual maturity because of its active remedial aspect (all vengeance belongs to God, according to Scripture). Widowhood, being an act of God, increases spiritual maturity.

7. I have not merged the paradigms fully, in order to retain the fundamental opposition of the two concepts within a single framework. For example, to head a single column with "Baptist:business" would suggest that each group's paradigm was internally reciprocal, which, as I have explained above, they are not. They constitute reciprocals as whole paradigms.

# The Reproduction of the Ruling Class in Latifundist Sicily

1860–1920<sup>1</sup>

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## CLASS FORMATION AND POPULATION GROWTH UNDER CAPITALISM: THE SICILIAN CASE

Agrarian capitalism came to Sicily, as to so many peripheries of expanding Europe, in the nineteenth century. The transformation began in the late 1700s, when feudal lords, already the beneficiaries of market involvements, arbitrarily enclosed portions of their great estates, so as to exclude peasants from exercising use rights on them. Thereafter it proceeded through the combined impact of state policy and expanding internal and foreign markets for grain, wine grapes, and sulphur, Sicily's principal mineral resource. Capital investment, much of it English, encouraged the increased production of vineyards and mines, while a succession of Italian, if not "foreign," governments legislated the end of entails, primogeniture, promiscuous grazing rights on fiefs, and peasants' rights of access to common land.

The first of these governments, a Bourbon monarchy ruling Sicily from Naples, hoped to replace quasi-feudal relations in agriculture

with a land-tenure system based on modest holdings distributed among politically loyal middle peasants. Thus commons attached to rural settlements, the large agglomerated agrotowns of the Sicilian countryside, were to be subdivided into plots of fifteen to forty acres. In fact, however, commons became private property through another process: usurpation and illegal enclosure on the part of rich peasants and lords. In 1841, a law required lords who appropriated communal domain to compensate local peasants with a fifth of their feudal territories on which use rights had previously been exercised. In addition, it stipulated twenty years of protection from creditors for recipients of the redistributed land. But these government plans were not effective. Before anyone could force a lord to donate land, documents proving illegal ownership had to be assembled, and in the end, the new law merely legitimated additional arbitrary enclosures (Mack Smith 1968: 407–8).

In 1860, Italy was finally unified as a nation-state and, to help pay its staggering war debts, the national government expropriated and sold ecclesiastical properties, which in Sicily then occupied about 10 percent of arable land (Corleo 1871: 6). These properties were auctioned off in moderate-sized allotments and easily fell into the hands of the best-capitalized and most aggressive bidders—by then an emergent rural bourgeoisie or gentry, regionally known as the *ceto civile*, or “civilized class.” Although little is known in detail about the social origins of this formation, in a general sense it appears to have absorbed virtually anyone with accumulated capital, from rich peasants advantaged by the commercialization of agriculture to cadet sons of the aristocracy and urban entrepreneurs. Its most characteristic participant was the upwardly mobile *gabellotto*, so vividly portrayed by Anton Blok (1974)—a rentier who leased large holdings for six or nine years at a time, and divided the land for sublet among tenants and sharecroppers under contracts of short duration, usually no more than one year. Profits earned from this exploitative system, which minimized risk for the leaseholder at the expense of subtenants, were invested in subsequent long-term contracts “*a gabella*” and in the purchase of land (in addition to Blok, see Franchetti 1925; Sonnino 1925; Pontieri 1933; Romeo 1959; Scrofani 1962; Schneider and Schneider 1976).

Given their origins, it should be no surprise that the emergent *civili* (plural of *civile*) at first opposed the titled aristocracy, a class whose roots lay buried in the many conquests of Sicily in centuries past. Yet

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*civile* holdings were not gained at aristocratic expense so much as they were carved from ecclesiastical and communal domain, from holdings once used promiscuously to accommodate transhumant grazing, and from the small properties of peasants whom the *gabellotto* system increasingly drove into debt. In the politics of Italian unification, the rising gentry favored the national liberal state, while most of the aristocracy remained loyal to the absolutist Bourbon crown. In subsequent decades, however, this rift was healed and the *civili*, threatened from below by rebelling peasants, increasingly assimilated to the class above them. What set them off from the old nobility was not their humble origins or momentary flirtation with a democratic political platform, but the fact that they pursued their version of an urbane, civilized way of life (see Silverman 1975: 1–8) in the rural towns of the Sicilian interior rather than at court in Naples or abroad; and the fact that, by the turn of the century, landless day laborers called *braccianti*, as distinct from sharecroppers and tenants, cultivated ever more of the latifundia—their vast, privately owned, estates.

These estates often reached a thousand acres or more in the cereal-cultivating zones of the interior, and yet they were vulnerable to a shifting international market almost from the start. In 1863, the national government eliminated the price controls and export restrictions that had earlier inhibited the free circulation of grain in Italy, thereby encouraging cultivation of a larger surplus. In the 1870s, however, growers began to meet competition in European markets from mechanically produced American wheat which, with the end of the Civil War and the increased use of railroads and steamships, penetrated Europe at an accelerated pace, as Argentinian wheat did later. The resulting drop in prices led the national government, in 1886–87, to respond with a protective tariff on imported cereals, but depression and crisis deepened even so (see Bairoch 1976). In addition, the tariff policy provoked a trade war with France, until then the major importer of Sicilian must for wine. Coming on the heels of the phylloxera, which attacked the island's vineyards in the late 1870s and 1880s, this trade war reversed several decades of well-financed viticulture expansion (Mack Smith 1968: 469–84).

If changing markets undermined the conditions that had led to the formation of the *civile* class, so did a changing relationship to labor. According to local records of the 1880s, the economic crisis was becoming so severe that many families could no longer afford a dowry,



or even a small contribution to the festival of the patron saint. In 1889, the Sicilian *fasci*, worker and peasant leagues, appeared, first in cities among artisans, subsequently among artisans and peasants in the rural towns. Peasant followers occupied one-time communal holdings on which they had enjoyed use rights; they burned tax records to protest high taxes; and they bargained for agricultural contracts more favorable to sharecroppers, tenants, and wage laborers. In January 1893, the national government sent in troops and the uprising was severely quelled—a fate experienced in similar disturbances over the next few years.

Protective tariffs could stave off, but they could not resolve, the economic dislocations of a changing grain market, just as government troops in the early 1890s could, without making a dent in rising unemployment, suppress the struggle of peasants and artisans that grew out of the agricultural depression. In subsequent years, these stopgap measures ceased, and Sicily entered a radically new phase in its evolving relationship with the metropolies of international capitalism, a phase in which labor exports became the principal source of foreign exchange. As agricultural products declined in value on foreign and domestic markets, so did the economic significance of owning large estates, and the flow of migrant labor, although it undermined a courageous phase of labor militancy, also enhanced the bargaining power of laborers who remained at home (see MacDonald 1963). Landlords responded by allowing their estates to revert to pasturage, or by purchasing agricultural machinery, thus reducing their dependence on a force of cultivators. To the extent that the *civile* class retained its wealth and power after 1900, it was largely because its members enjoyed this flexibility vis-à-vis the laboring poor.

Concomitant with the formation of capitalist classes and class relations in Sicilian agriculture (a formation that must be understood as variously compromised and incomplete, at least until the twentieth century) was an increase in the rate of population growth. Between 1814 and 1861, the population of the island grew by 19 percent, from a little over 2 million to 2.39 million. In the next forty-year period, the golden age of the rising *civili*, the population increased almost 50 percent, reaching 3.53 million by 1901. A 27 percent increase characterized the subsequent five decades, during which the number of

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inhabitants grew to 4,486,749, notwithstanding the loss of well over a million people to overseas migration, most although not all of whom did not return. Within the period of greatest expansion, 1861–1901, the decades of the 1870s and 1880s stand out as special. Both were characterized by slight mortality drops over the previous ten years, and a natality increase rather than decline. As a result, birth rates exceeded death rates by as many as 14 percent each year, and overall population grew at 12.5 percent in ten years, compared with 7.72 percent in the decade 1862–71 (see Prestianni 1947: 14ff; SVIMEZ 1954: 62; Arceri 1973: 42–44; Somogyi 1974: 32).

In an effort to probe the relationship between class formation and rapid population growth in the century after 1850, this paper draws upon the preliminary findings of a family reconstitution study which we began three years ago in Villamaura, pseudonym for a town in the latifundist interior of southwestern Sicily that grew from just under 9,000 in 1861 to a little over 11,000 in 1921, and that numbers approximately 7,500 today. Using this town's vital records, we reconstituted the families of 840 couples in eight marriage cohorts: 1850–51; 1860–61; 1870–71; 1880–81; 1890, 1899, and 1920. (The years were selected to coincide with the national census, taken at the beginning of each decade, and were doubled in the case of the first four decades in order to provide enough cases for statistical analysis. The marriage register for 1900 happened to be the only missing document, hence the choice of 1899.)

For each couple, the records provided husband's and wife's occupation. These designations, refined by cross-checking with land and house cadasters, draft lists, and the notary's archive in which are recorded the dowries of some 20 percent of marriages, enabled us to group the families into three, roughly defined, social strata: (1) poor, landless or nearly landless peasants, shepherds, and agricultural laborers; (2) a middle sector of better-off peasants (owning land or animals), artisans, traders, and cart drivers; and (3) the *civile* class of upwardly mobile landed gentry, wealthy merchants of gold and cloth, doctors, lawyers, and descendants of titled nobility still living in the agrotown. Contextual information was gleaned from a survey of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century architecture and artifacts; from written and oral histories; and from the deliberations of town council

meetings that are continuous from the 1870s. Together with diaries and novels of the period, these sources add a portrait of daily life to the otherwise rather flat economic characteristics of each category.

The study's central result to some extent challenges two commonly held interpretations of the nineteenth-century population explosion in Europe: one that growth resulted overwhelmingly from falling mortality, and the other that a falling age at marriage among peasants dispossessed from land was the principal cause. Both interpretations had some basis in the Sicilian reality, but both were also contradicted, until the turn of the century, by the class-specific effects of health and nutritional change. For, although the capitalist transformation did initially result in an intensified use of land, as pasture everywhere yielded to the plow, or to goat-based dairying, and as arable lowland supported a greater variety of specialized crops, only the diets of the *civile* class, and of the middle sector of artisans, tradesmen, and better-off peasants, stood to benefit. For others, nutritional standards deteriorated to the point that the overall slight mortality decline of the 1870s and 1880s masked a contradictory trend—an increase in mortality among the poor. Especially marked for poor infants, this increase cancelled out the fertility-maximizing potential of early marriage, at least until the twentieth century, when several state-sponsored projects in the domains of health, sanitation, and transport at last reached completion, allowing for a mortality decline across the board.

Analysis of our reconstituted families suggests that from 1860 until around 1900, middle- and upper-stratum families contributed more substantially to rising population than did rural landless families, even when the latter displayed lower ages of women at marriage, but that after the turn of the century, contributions to a growing population came disproportionately from proletarianized peasants, others having begun to limit family size through late marriage or birth control. Contextual information points to the further conclusion that in each of these quite distinct phases, *civile* families were pacesetters, adopting new ideas and techniques of significance for biological and social reproduction in advance of others. It seems to us likely that *civile* reproductive behavior served as a model for couples in the middle stratum who could afford to emulate it and that, in addition, the expansion and then contraction of the *civile* class may have indirectly influenced others' fertility through its effects on the local market for

labor, including the specialized labor of artisans and landowning peasants. For these and other reasons, we feel that an examination of the reproductive histories of rising gentry families might add yet another dimension to the complex picture of interacting variables at work in the coincidence of demographic and political-economic changes.

How do we then understand *civile* reproduction? It is a premise of this paper that, although the *civile* families of Sicily offer a striking case of a broad correspondence between economic opportunity and reproductive behavior, their rhythm of expansion and contraction largely coinciding at home and on the land, it would be a mistake to rest an analysis here. For these families, at the same time that they constituted a landed class after 1860, also participated in two other emerging formations: a “ruling class” and a “social elite.” The three groups overlapped considerably, but were not identical. Indeed, in the vital registers, the label “*civile*” was sometimes given to merchants or professionals whose landholdings were modest, while an important Villamaura legend concerns an upwardly mobile *gabellotto* of the late nineteenth century who purchased a large estate but was denied membership in the *Circolo dei Civili*, an exclusive local men’s club, because he was too “*rozzo*,” too rustic.

Nevertheless, for the great majority of families referred to as *civile*, ownership of large estates, high positions in local and regional government, and elite social position were interconnected. In many families, in fact, a division of labor arose in which some members tended to land, others to politics, and others, especially women, to guarding and enhancing reputation. In the following pages, we will first present data from our sample that compare the reproductive histories of *civile* families to the reproductive histories of others, then interpret these data in light of the concepts “ruling class” and “social elite.”

### THE REPRODUCTIVE HISTORIES OF *CIVILE* FAMILIES

For the purpose of this paper, we have chosen to consider only the cohorts 1860–61 to 1920, which include 690 of the 840 sampled couples. In addition, we have eliminated a total of 134 families who had no children, largely because the reasons for their childlessness cannot always be specified, and some of these families may have

**Table I:** Mean Number of Births and Surviving Children by Stratum and Cohort

Cohort	Civile			Non-Civile		
	No. of Families	Mean No. Births	Mean No. Surviving Children	No. of Families	Mean No. Births	Mean No. Surviving Children
1860-61	6	3.83	3.5	113	5.23	2.84
1870-71	7	6.57	5.14	116	5.22	2.84
1880-81	7	5.71	4.43	114	4.77	2.72
1890	2	5.5	4.0	54	5.31	3.41
1899	2	5.5	5.5	26	3.65	2.92
1910	1	4	3.0	30	4.77	3.70
1920	4	2.75	2.25	74	4.46	3.70

emigrated. We have divided the remaining 556 families into two groups, one consisting of *civile*, the other of all non-*civile*. The latter category includes the rural landless and land-poor, plus the middle stratum of better-off peasants, artisans, and tradesmen. The elimination of families with no children reduced the total number of *civile* cases from 37 to 29, that is, by 22 percent. The same operation brought non-*civile* cases down to 527 from 653, a drop of 19 percent. Table I records the mean number of children born to the sampled couples, by social stratum and cohort, and the mean number of children who survived at least the first five years of life, hereafter referred to as “surviving children.”

According to the table, *civile* families were, on the average, larger than non-*civile* families until the twentieth century, when we begin to see a reverse trend. Taking the 1870-71 and 1880-81 cohorts together so as to increase the number of families, we discover that 5 of the 14 *civile* couples who married in those years reached birth parities of 9 or more, while the parities of another 5 fell between 5 and 8. Moreover, 49 percent of the surviving children of these marriages were born to the families with the 9-plus parities; 39 percent to the families whose parities were 5 to 8. Although large parities of course contribute more children to the next generation, how many more living children is another question. Non-*civile* families of the same marriage cohorts look rather different. Only 12 percent of the 230 families had birth

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**Table II:** Mean Ages of Wife at Marriage and Last Child for the 9-Plus Parity

Cohort	Civile			Non-Civile		
	Mean Age Marriage	Mean Age Last Child	Diff.	Mean Age Marriage	Mean Age Last Child	Diff.
1870-71	21.5	40.5	19 yrs.	19.6	42	22.4 yrs.
1880-81						
1890-99		no cases		19.6	41	21.4 yrs.
1910-20		no cases		18.7	41	22.3 yrs.

parities of more than 9 (as against 36 percent for the *civile*); and these large parities accounted for only 21 percent of living offspring (compare the *civile's* 49 percent). The 5-8 parity for non-*civile* families was a larger group, however, and accounted for 54 percent of viable offspring, a figure greater than the 39 percent of viable offspring born to *civili* with this parity.

Like the mean number of live children per marriage, the percent of marriages leading to large parities declined for the *civile* after 1890. Beginning with that cohort, no *civile* families reached a parity of 9 again; and in 1910 and 1920, there were none in the 5-8 parity either. All *civile* marriages in these cohorts produced 4, or fewer, children. On the other hand, 8 percent of non-*civile* families fell into the 9-plus parity in 1910 and 1920, producing 17 percent of the living children, while 40 percent had parities of 5 to 8 and accounted for 55 percent of living children. Only 30 percent of descendants came from small (1 to 4) parity families, as against the *civile's* 100 percent—further indication of a change at the turn of the century.

The above figures underscore the extent to which the *civile* class reproduced itself through large families in the nineteenth century. Such families clearly required a long reproductive career on the part of wives; yet *civile* wives were not necessarily tied down to child rearing for longer periods than were wives in general. If anything, their careers as mothers were slightly shorter, as indicated by the mean ages at marriage and last child for the 9-plus and 5-to-8 parities.

In the twentieth century, the largest families in Villamaura were families of proletarians and not the rich. Mothers of these families

**Table III:** Mean Ages of Wife at Marriage and Last Child for the 5 to 8 Parity

Cohort	Civile			Non-Civile		
	Mean Age Marriage	Mean Age Last Child	Diff.	Mean Age Marriage	Mean Age Last Child	Diff.
1870-71	21.3	36.2	14.9 yrs.	22	37.2	15.2 yrs.
1880-81						
1890-91		only two cases		21.8	37.8	16 yrs.
1910-20		no cases		22	37	15 yrs.

**Table IV:** Surviving Children as a Percent of Births by Stratum and Cohort

Cohort	Civile			Non-Civile		
	No. Surviving Children	No. Births	Percent	No. Surviving Children	No. Births	Percent
1860-61	21	23	91%	321	591	54%
1870-71	36	46	78%	330	605	55%
1880-81	31	40	78%	310	544	57%
1890	8	11	73%	184	287	64%
1899	11	11	100%	76	95	80%
1910	3	4	75%	111	143	78%
1920	9	11	82%	274	330	83%

were almost always teenage brides and continued to bear children after they became grandmothers or potential grandmothers. Neither of these attributes of the large family characterized *civile* reproductive behavior, although there were a few teenage marriages, which means that these families produced their children with considerable efficiency for that time. Table IV compares surviving children as a percent of births by stratum and cohort.

For cohorts before 1890, more than twenty percentage points separated *civile* from non-*civile* families when it came to the survival rates of their children. Although this gap narrowed in the twentieth century, its impact was considerable before then. Looking at the cohorts 1870-71 and 1880-81 for the 9-plus parity, we see that *civile* families had a mean of 6.75 surviving children, spaced with a mean of 2.75 years between them. Non-*civile* families for the same parity and cohorts had

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only 5.3 surviving children spaced about 5.3 years apart. The 5-to-8 parity exhibits the same discrepancy:

**Table V:** *Mean Number of Surviving Children per Family in the 5-to-8 Parity and the Mean Number of Years Between Them, by Social Stratum*

Cohort	Civile		Non-Civile	
	Mean No. Surviving Children	Their Mean Birth Interval	Mean No. Surviving Children	Their Mean Birth Interval
1870-71	5	3.3 yrs.	3.6	5.3 yrs.
1880-81				
1890-99	7	2.0 yrs.	4.3	4.3 yrs.

These data on the mean number of surviving children in large families and on the intervals between their births, are further highlighted when we consider the average height and weight of boys who lived to appear in the draft registers at age eighteen. Again until the twentieth century when conditions began to improve for the lower strata, *civile* boys were often more than a head taller than other boys, which brings us to consider the nutritional basis for *civile* reproductive success. Most significant was the minimal role that their own mother's milk played in infant care. For what made high productivity and close spacing of children an option for *civile* landowners was wet-nursing, a service that middle- and upper-class families purchased from peasants and artisans in Italy and other urbanized or urbanizing European regions dating from the Renaissance (see Ross 1974). In Carlo Cipolla's apt words, the economic and social implications of wet-nursing "compared with the importance of the baby food industry in our contemporary society" (1976: 71-73).

Historians have given us the cultural context of the wet-nursing practice. It reinforced the husband-wife dyad in an epoch when, at the pinnacle of society, nuclear families were assuming a definable shape. Husbands, jealous of their wives' attention to infants, scored an oedipal triumph when these infants were sent away. Wives apparently acquiesced in the separation on the grounds that lactation was a "natural" process, instinctively followed by animals and peasants but



inappropriate for the “civilized” (Hunt 1970: 100–108; Schnucker 1974: 646). Because of such prejudices, it was common for urban elites to install their babies in the homes of rural nurses for about three years until weaning, rather than bring hired nurses into their households. Of course there were serious risks, but elite families developed strategies to overcome them. Oral histories, collected in Villamaura, yielded the information that landowners engaged nurses under a variety of conditions depending, in part, on their own wealth and position. All nurses received a combination of money and kind, but above all a daily allotment of high-protein foods such as goats’ cheese and goats’ milk. At one extreme, the nurse’s own child was healthy and the landowner distrusted her so much that he would station spies outside her house to determine if his child were well cared for, or weigh his child before and after feedings. At the other extreme, the nurse’s own child died because the patron’s child was favored. Most often, however, the nurse or her husband arranged to sell her milk just after their child had died.

Apart from reinforcing a prejudice in favor of separating “culture” and “nature,” the wet-nursing practice could potentially have affected natality because it eliminated the period of amenorrhea associated with lactation in the mother, thereby shortening by a few months the time within which she could become pregnant again. Recent studies of birth interval dynamics show that the relationship between lactation and protection against conception is not absolute; much depends on the frequency and intensity of the infant’s suckling and on whether mother’s milk is supplemented with other foods (e.g. Wray 1978). Thus in some contexts, taboos on sexual intercourse provide a back-up for amenorrhea in guaranteeing to children a long lactation period (e.g. Caldwell and Caldwell 1977), whereas in others, a too-close spacing of children results in a higher rate of infant mortality owing to competition for sustenance (Knodel 1968). Among Sicilian families of the *civile* class, wet-nursing appears to have obviated both of these outcomes, making it possible for a large number of children to be closely spaced at minimum risk, as our data on average family size and length of time between children show.

By hiring wet nurses, and by spacing their children closely together within marriage, couples of the *civile* class in late nineteenth-century Sicily were caught up in a “reproductive regime” that was partly of their own making, even though their resultant large families also reflected the improvements in health, sanitation, and nutrition that led

to a mortality decline for them, if for few others. Similarly, by around the turn of the century, *civile* couples had begun to adopt another practice of significance to the patterning of sexual and reproductive relations—the practice of family limitation. This form of birth control, with its emphasis on ceasing to have children once the desired number is reached, appears to have been an innovation that spread in nineteenth-century Europe as the death rate declined (see Knodel 1977). According to our informants, in Villamaura *civile* couples were the first to adopt it, using techniques of coitus interruptus and abstinence because the newly manufactured condoms of vulcanized rubber were too expensive and difficult to obtain.

As wet-nursing and family limitation are aspects of reproduction that involve thought and will, we must raise the question what motivated *civile* couples to want large families before the turn of the century, and want small ones thereafter. This is no easy question to answer, for despite the coincidence of ideational change with a drastically changing economic picture, the people involved were more than just reactive. To capture some of the complexity of their lives, we propose to consider them not only as landowners, but as deeply involved in putting together a ruling class and social elite after 1860, and to argue that these activities also helped shape their reproductive careers.

### THE CIVILI AS A RULING CLASS

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, local magnates, sometimes called by the English word *boss*, competed for the formal positions of mayor, junta, and council member in the agrotowns and for positions on the boards that administered local charities. Municipal archives, still intact for most towns, are a rich resource for the study of their machinations. There are, first of all, deliberations of town councils and junta meetings dating back to 1877 when the first councils were elected. Although the minutes of the junta contain almost no information, those of the council do, and both name the principal actors. In addition, the archives include packets of correspondence between municipal officers and higher-level authorities: subprefects in the district capitals, prefects in the provincial capitals, and various national courts and administrative bodies. This correspondence opens a window on the decision-making process of what has become known

as the bossism era and also reveals the composition of local factions: who voted with whom and on what issues, and who did what to clients of the opposition in order to favor clients of their own.

The Marquis di Rudini, a Sicilian aristocrat who served as prime minister during the period in question, thought that Italy was "abandoning Sicilians to exploitation by local factions" (quoted in Mack Smith 1968: 483). The intellectuals, Mosca and Pareto, analyzed why. In 1882, the suffrage in Italy increased from 600,000 to about 2 million, as artisans and small holders gained the franchise through the use of literacy tests. Until the suffrage was extended to all adult males in 1911, however, political parties were only rudimentary. Rather, local bosses, especially in the South and Sicily, "made elections" for national parliamentary deputies whose allies, ministers of the state, dispensed patronage and protection in exchange. The local bosses, feeding at the trough of this national bonanza, were in a position to manipulate inferiors through the allocation of privileges and favors, as well as through the heavy-handed use of police violence. By talking to a handful of such "grand electors," a deputy could expect to gain "several hundred votes" (Mosca 1949: 198). For Pareto the resulting abuses were an integral part of the state formation process "because the same persons who dominate the communal (local, town) councils are the chief electors of the deputies who, in their turn, employ their influence with the government to screen the misdeeds of their friends and partisans" (quoted in Mack Smith 1968: 484).

In his taxonomy of political decision makers, Anthony Giddens (1974) reviews criteria by which to estimate their strength. One yardstick is the extent to which a particular group has centralized power. Within the municipal arena, Sicilian bosses of the decades 1870 to 1910 appear unchallenged, except by the opposition faction within their own group. Here the archival correspondence of a town like Villamaura is revealing, for it illustrates numerous instances in which local-level decisions, attacked on legal and other grounds by subprefects and prefects, were eventually upheld by authorities at the highest levels of the state. In effect, mayors and their close allies had a free hand to hire and fire as they pleased; assess and collect taxes differentially, according to political allegiance; and award lucrative public works and tax-farming contracts on the same personalistic basis. Their power to rig elections through the manipulation of literacy tests had few limits. When one or another group of national politicians backed him, a

mayor could remove dozens of names from the voting register and add dozens more in their place.

Another dimension of decision-maker strength emphasized by Giddens is the range of issues over which a group regularly has influence. Sicilian political bosses scored high here too, dominating many aspects of the lives of others. As noted above, they sat on the board which governed local charities. This gave them control over the allocation of welfare monies and, if the archival correspondence of Villamaura is an accurate guide, provided them with significant opportunity for graft. Their involvement was similarly pervasive in town planning and public works. Decisions about local contributions to national projects for roads, railroads, water mains, and port construction rested with them, as did the building code that they administered to favor their friends. Even public health and education fell under the bosses' jurisdiction, as mayors and their advisors directed the careers of the handful of doctors, midwives, and teachers then in the public employ.

A final approach to estimating the strength of Sicily's political bosses is their social origins for which there are two important sources of information. One is the land and house cadasters that date to 1867 and 1877, respectively. In these years, alphabetical listings of all property holders—persons or groups liable to taxation—were made. The lists, updated over the years until the appearance of new registers under fascism, enable one to look up individual and family holdings, their size and assessed valuation, at least to the extent that holdings lay within the territory of a given town. In addition, the vital registers can be used to supplement the social profile of a political boss if one has a point of entry: approximate date of birth, marriage, or death. A survey of names that emerge as significant in the correspondence and deliberations of Villamaura against this town's cadastral records tells us that, until the expansion of the suffrage in 1911, the political bosses were mainly recruited from the landed class.

Given who the bosses were and how much power they had, it should not surprise us that they served landowners' interests. Thus, *civile* bosses managed the auctions at which ecclesiastical and communal holdings were sold in a way that intimidated peasant bidders. When peasants did acquire property, access to credit was the critical factor in their ability to keep it, but the bosses controlled a court that backed the claims of moneylenders, including those extorting high interest rates. Local archives contain the proceedings of this court, and give

a picture of chronic peasant indebtedness, even for seed, while council deliberations describe the municipal jail—a new institution occupying a building expropriated from the church—as full of debtors. In addition, political bosses had, as private retainers, various semiprivate police and security forces, bandits and mafiosi, who kept the peasant labor force in line.

Taxation policy is the best evidence that the political bosses worked for local landowners. Since the sixteenth century, government in Sicily had been underwritten to a surprising degree by excise taxes on food, especially a much-hated grist tax on milled flour. Because rural settlements are tightly nucleated, uninhabited countryside surrounding them, these taxes were efficient to collect, and more so as water-driven flour mills were constructed near streams outside the towns. Each settlement had one or more gates of entry for rural produce and flour, manned by aggressive tax farmers.

In earlier centuries, Spanish taxes on Sicilian wheat exports, plus extraordinary levies that the nobility voted to meet emergencies, supplemented the grist and food taxes, if inadequately. There was, however, no land or real estate tax, even though the aristocrats no longer owed military service to the crown. Later, these supplementary taxes disappeared, but it was not until the nineteenth century that land surveys were undertaken and a real estate tax imposed. According to an 1820 estimate, food taxes were so high as to equal a third or more of the basic cost of food, while in 1850, the land tax yielded but a third of government revenues, food taxes making up over half (Mack Smith 1968: 317–18, 396, 487).

During the political turmoil surrounding Italian Unification, the *ceto civile*, then opposed to the old aristocracy, supported Garibaldi's temporary governorship of Sicily, during which the grist tax was abolished. In 1868, however, a new regime reinstated this tax, which remained on the books until 1880. Consistent with the reinstatement, *civile* landowners broke ties with the peasantry from which many of them had originated to forge an alliance with noblemen instead. Thus, even after 1880, the burden on the poor of excise taxes on cheese, wine, vegetables, sugar, and especially flour persisted, so that by the end of the century, the poorest peasants no longer ate pasta or bread, but soups of wild vegetables, fava beans, and a gruel called *pitirru* made from home-milled grains. Peasant wives and daughters, although rarely employed on the latifundia, led arduous lives, for it was they

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who collected beans and wild vegetables, picked up grain stalks that fell to the ground during the harvest, and made coarse flours on their own grinding stones. In these years infant mortality made large families unusual among the poor.

The narrow recruitment base of the political bosses, and the extent to which they used their power on behalf of landowners, suggest that the *ceto civile* of late nineteenth-century Sicily constituted a regional “ruling class.” This is so in the sense outlined by Giddens that ruling classes are the strongest type of political decision-making group, being drawn from a privileged stratum and wielding highly centralized power over a wide range of issues. It is also true in the Marxist sense of a “definite alignment of state and economy, involving the central role of private property . . .” (Giddens 1974:xiii, 6–7).

What this meant for the *civili* as reproducers of children was an expanding niche of professional activities, government positions, sinecures, franchises, and contracts that supplemented land as an inducement to high fertility. One can, indeed, picture men of this group self-consciously deploying loyal and respectful clients, friends, and offspring in channels and posts that a new national state made locally and regionally available, especially after it had expropriated church property in the 1860s. This was an integral part of the “grand elector” role.

Seeking positions for close relatives in the public and quasi-public sectors was, however, not without contradictions, for, although individual families could move up with the support of a thoughtfully constructed social network, the *civile* class as a whole probably gave rise to more offspring in any generation than could comfortably be well placed. We infer this from the highly factious political style of the bossism era, during which intra-*civile* competition was intense. Archived correspondence and legal briefs pertaining to inheritance and land use tell us that, in part, competition focused on economic resources. The notary’s records of marriage transactions between *civile* families further show dowry inflation to have been a sore point, suggesting competition for strategic marriage alliances. Most telling, though, was political competition at the regional level, explicated by Mosca in his late nineteenth-century description of the University of Palermo, where teachers were subjected to pressure, even intimidation, because too many sons of rural *civili* were sent there for law degrees (Mosca 1949: 191; also Mack Smith 1959: 261).

It was not only the economic base of the *ceto civile* that had begun to erode by 1900; its political base was vulnerable as well. In the early twentieth century, incipient political parties, especially of the left, were already forging links between local populations and the national government that short-circuited the political monopolies of the *civile* bosses, while emigration gave erstwhile clients other options as well. Reading the council deliberations of Villamaura, one concludes that internal strife intensified at this time. Divisions that had been submerged in the 1870s and 1880s reached a peak of absurdity from the early 1890s on. Thus, the years of the *fasci*, 1892–96, saw the rise of two cliques of *civile* bosses, bitterly opposed to each other, and a third that took over local government in 1901. Their uncompromising rivalry meant that each change of local government after 1896 literally rocked “city hall,” as incoming mayors fired and hired; absolved friends of debts to the town while prosecuting enemies for back taxes; dropped the law suits of predecessors against violations of the building code, only to launch new suits of their own; and changed the composition of the electoral list by various fraudulent means.

The poisoned political atmosphere comes down to us through words like “odious,” “rancorous,” and “spilt bile,” which punctuated the council meetings. One wonders how extensively this atmosphere pervaded the private lives of the political bosses, for in just this period they were experimenting with a new family ideal—one that emphasized the sacrifice of sexual gratification in favor of a small number of children. Such experiments, and the discussions surrounding them, must have been furthered by an awareness that power and privilege were, like agricultural productivity, on the wane. (Conversely, it is not impossible that subordinated sexuality played a role in the bitterness of quarrels.)

### THE *CETO CIVILE* AS A SOCIAL ELITE

And yet, ruling class reproduction was no more a simple reflection of political than it was of economic conditions, being mediated by considerations of status and personal experience. As various kinds of evidence make clear, members of *civile* families continually looked outside themselves for guidance on a course of action, including its moral and social implications. Thus, they vied with each other to emulate the urbane luminaries of Palermo and foreign capitals whose

way of life was locally known, despite poor transportation, through the comings and goings of cloth and gold merchants, government officials, noblemen who retained a country residence, and the occasional class equals who traveled. They also vied for tokens of recognition from this outside world, and for tokens of deference from status inferiors. Given their preoccupation with status, it is inconceivable that they saw their families only as reservoirs of economic and political advancement—although of course this was partly what they were. We must assume that they also measured them against an elite definition of what a family should be.

Before we explore what went into this definition in late nineteenth-century Sicily, it may be useful to specify the way in which we are using the concept *elite*, for it is a common, but inconsistently defined term. In political theory, *elite* usually refers to a small, tightly knit minority of powerful people who make decisions of great weight and scope having to do with the allocation of valued resources for a community or society at large (Bachrach 1967; Giddens 1974). A major issue raised by this usage is whether or not such minorities have an economic, political, or some other sort of “base,” that is, whether or not they are also classes, defined by their relationship to production. Generally speaking, the term *elite* implies that economic power and political power are analytically separable, and that political institutions such as those of the state have autonomy from, if not control over, economic process. Most, if not all, authorities on political elites thus insist that the minorities they study derive a significant portion of their power from “extraeconomic” sources. This is, after all, the tradition that Pareto and Mosca established in their respective critiques of Marxism.

Although we agree that polity and economy are analytically separable, each implying its own domain of, and means for, the accumulation of wealth and power and the control over productive resources, we would also have to conclude, along with a minority of protagonists in the debate on elites, that in capitalist social formations, owners of the means of production are continually caught up in political decision making, directly as the government officials that some of them become, indirectly through campaign contributions and special-interest lobbying, informally through networks of friends and kin—all of this over and above their role in highly political (if publically unaccountable) corporate decision making on such comprehensive issues as techno-



logical change, plant location, employment policy, worker discipline, and so on (McConnell 1966; Bachrach 1967). The question we would raise in connection with this controversy is whether the convergence of economic and political means and domains under capitalism in itself involves the formation of elites. It is a question that derives from the very etymology of the word, which carries with it the idea of “elect” as in chosen by God.

Elites, it seems to us, must always have some relationship to concentrated wealth and power, whether the concentration is familial, communal, or institutional. But what they are really about is justifying these concentrations, and the processes underlying their creation, to themselves and others, through right living and the ideological legitimation of superiority. Criteria of validation differ widely from, for example, an ascetic religious elite that embraces poverty, to jet-set swingers who distance themselves from ordinary folk by pursuing ever more costly entertainments and luxuries, to people who found their claims on genealogy. In each case—and what makes it possible to refer to them all as “elites”—there is a self-awareness of transcending society, coupled with the political and economic means to remain aloof. Each case might also involve a redistributive relationship with nonelites. Acts of charity, philanthropy, patronage, and hospitality are characteristic, if not necessary, aspects of elite behavior.

Just as in political theory the concept *elite* is often counterposed to the concept of a propertied class, so this usage, with its emphasis on justification—elites as elect—might appear to define groups whose members stand outside of, or above, class interest. For, unless understood in relation to processes of accumulation and concentration, elite extravagance (or extreme self-denial) can appear benign and amusing, while redistributive acts of charity and civic service look like a moral counterweight to exploitation. Elites may be the very people who own or control the key productive resources of a community or nation, but as elites they are less a source of injustice, or a threat to social stability, than they are as a class. Even selfish sumptuary indulgence takes on a positive valence insofar as it can be shown to add grace, charm, and aesthetic value to the places where elite families live. Whereas an owning class appropriates the surplus labor of others to the point of undermining community life, an elite contributes to its community and is awarded high status for doing so.

Notwithstanding the distinctions between social elite and landed

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class, or ruling class, as ways to label the rich and powerful, there is no need to wed these terms to mutually exclusive social groups, for of greatest interest is the considerable, if imperfect, frequency with which the same people participate in all three. To return to our Sicilian case, the rising gentry of the nineteenth century founded exclusive men's clubs in most of the rural towns, the one in Villamaura, the *Circolo dei Civili*, being housed in a salon with frescoed ceilings, a billiard table, and great leather chairs. One joined this club only upon a two-thirds vote of the membership—a procedure that worked against an occasional large landowner who was considered too lowly for admission, just as it sometimes brought in a well-connected professional who had little land. Over the long run, the club was sustained by a nucleus of landed gentry, but insofar as it validated status on the basis of such criteria as education and manners, it encouraged its members to supplement narrow economic self-interest with the simultaneous pursuit of prestige.

Perhaps the most overt way that Villamaura's large landowners and bosses strove for recognition as a social elite after 1860 was through the construction, renovation, or embellishment of a "great house"—a *casa civile*—facing the main street or, if such a prestigious location were unavailable, embedded in a crowded neighborhood of the rural town. (Some *civile* families also commissioned the construction of a second home in a nearby rural zone of orchards and vineyards.) According to the 1877 house cadaster, there were about 2,200 houses in Villamaura. Half of them were one- or two-room dwellings; another third were composed of three to five rooms. Of the remaining larger houses, a little over a hundred were designated "*casa civile*." These ranged in size from a one-story, nine-room house to a *palazzo* of thirty rooms on three floors (see Gabaccia 1979).

Although not usually detached from the continuous construction that characterizes the highly nucleated settlements of rural Sicily, the *casa civile* was distinctive in many ways. Made wholly or partially from cut stone, rather than rough stone and stucco, it was richly decorated and furnished with imports as well as the products of specially trained local craftsmen (P. Schneider 1978). In addition, it fulfilled what were considered to be requirements of civilized living, notwithstanding its location in a rural town. This meant that its many rooms were set off from one another according to function: separate sleeping quarters for male and female children, hosts and guests; and specialized rooms for

toiletries, dining, ceremonial occasions, and managing the family's estate. The largest houses in Villamaura had ballrooms for dancing furnished with imported grand pianos, and one *palazzo* also contained a chapel.

Other spatial uses in the great houses of the *civile* class suggest the extent to which these structures were more than private places, and equipped to feed and entertain large numbers of people. Here we refer to storerooms, kitchens, cellars, interior gardens in which vegetables were grown, and several stalls where, in addition to the transport animals of the *padrone*, those of visitors from distant towns found shelter. More than anything else, the *casa civile* was a center of expansive hospitality in which social relations were cemented and extended through various forms of impression management such as lavish parties in celebration of calendric and life-cycle rituals, displays of finery, and the strategic bestowal of gifts.

On the one hand, the ruling-class house was a collection point for produce from the land, and for wealth acquired in the marketplace and through inheritance, dowry, and gifts. On the other hand, it was a place from which surplus flowed, not only to individual friends and guests, but to institutions as well. Thus *civile* families in Villamaura regularly donated money to local orphanages, hospitals, and other pious works; placed objects of gold and silver at the feet of the local patron saint; and financed civic improvements which in the late nineteenth century consisted of a small theater and public garden. Without question, the household nexus took in more than it gave away, yet enough flowed through the networks of charity, patronage, and host-guest relations socially and politically to secure and reinforce the position of those on top.

In the 1870s and 1880s, the heads of the great *civile* households must have been "people collectors"—magnates who gained prestige from attaching others to themselves, including a retinue of their own children. For it would have been inconsistent to build a thirty-room house, staff it with servants, and open it to guests, only to have two children or three or four. In fact, a great deal of household activity focused on reproductive relations, if one sees the endless round of parties, balls, and musical evenings as a staging ground for courtship and marriage. Although the landlord or boss might count on sons and sons-in-law to protect his interests and reputation in government and

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**Table VI:** Average Number of Births Per Year, Legitimate and Illegitimate

Years	Average No. Legitimate Births/Year	Average No. Illegitimate Births/Year	Percent Illegitimate
1875-79*	322	10.6	3.0%
1880-89	321	15.0	4.5%
1890-99	300	20.9	6.5%
1900-09	247	6.3	2.0%
1910-19	189	1.7	.8%

\*Data are incomplete for the years 1870-74.

on the land, it was also a mark of honor, gratifying in itself, to watch his line multiply.

Pride in progeny is evident in the life of Giuseppe di Lampedusa's imposing character, the insatiable lover in *The Leopard*, Don Fabrizio. Father of seven children, patron of several prostitutes, this representative of a ruling-class tradition older than the *ceto civile's* was filled with pride at the sight of his brood around the dinner table, finding there a "confirmation of his lordship over both humans and their work" (Lampedusa 1963: 12). According to an old baron of Villamaura, many men of *civile* status (the women were less enthusiastic) outdid themselves to reach a seventh child called *Septimo*, an eighth one called *Ottavio*, and more. Nor was it unusual for them to sire illegitimate offspring, as data we collected on illegitimacy show.

Birth registers in Sicily include children of unknown parentage and notations if such children were later recognized. Although many of them died in the first years of life, their rate of mortality being higher than the rate of infant deaths in the general population, by no means all of them did, for the town provided, at public expense, a wet nurse to nourish them. That their numbers were not insignificant until the twentieth century is indicated by Table VI, which records foundling births.

Foundlings recognized by a parent or parents fell into several categories that included those born to a couple too poor to wed who relied on the town's resources for infant nutrition until they married a few years later, and those born to a couple of whom the mother was poor and the father was *civile*. The latter represented only a small

proportion of recognitions, yet the fact that these recognitions existed is consistent with a widespread belief that ruling-class men were, like Don Fabrizio, profligate with women of lower status, perhaps especially in their years of bachelorhood, and after their wives had retired from having children. The use of maidservants in houses of the rich multiplied the opportunities for such indulgence. Servants were primarily daughters of peasants who could not afford dowry, and it is interesting that young, unwed peasant women frequently appear among the parents who recognized foundlings.

The sexual dominance of elite males over lower-class women is also suggested by the names of foundlings. Town officials, almost always *civile*, made up these names as they registered the births. Many alluded to the vagaries of wealth and fortune (Testa Fortunato, Temporale, Pocerobba, Pagapresto, Diamante, Oro, Paradiso); to personal characteristics (Terribile, Piedeforte, Discordia, Belsegna, Parlabene); to the cultural innovations and symbols of the period (Prussiano, Vapore, Chiara Telegrafo, Secolo Nuovo, Caruselo, Zucchero). Most names were at once whimsical, condescending, and cruel.

Because prestige and male sexual dominance interacted with self-interest in the formation of *civile* families in the nineteenth century, it was possible for a few magnates to persist in "profligacy" after the depression in agriculture and the loss of political monopolies had led most others to adopt birth control. Whether the increase in the rate of illegitimacy between 1890 and 1900 was an aspect of the transition to greater restraint within marriage we cannot know for sure, but our baronial informant, cited above, offered his father as an example of one landowner whose incontinence and megalomania dulled his better judgment, causing him to sire eight children within a marriage that began in 1901. These children, unable to enlarge the family patrimony in an age of contraction, experienced downward mobility through land division.

Yet, the family in question was an exception and not the rule, for, as the sampled cohorts suggest, most *civile* families had four or fewer children once Sicily's relationship to the world economy became one of exporting labor rather than "primary products" from the land. Around the turn of the century, in fact, the entire nexus of a large house, a large family, and a sexually and politically dominant male siring illegitimate as well as legitimate children, began to come apart, with

the eventual consequence that *civile* houses were divided into apartments, their owners gravitating out of towns like Villamaura to become absorbed in a regional and national middle class.

## CONCLUSION

In the preceding pages, we have seen that the reproductive behavior of the *civile* class in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Sicily corresponded rather closely to the economic and political resources which its members could control. Thus family size was at a maximum during a period when these resources were expanding, and at a minimum after 1900 when they began to contract severely. We have sought to understand this correspondence as more than a simple reflection of economic change. It was the outcome of several converging processes in which people called "*civile*" represented not only (and not exclusively) a landed gentry, but also a relatively cohesive group of client-attracting, retainer-generating, political actors, living with wives, children, and servants in great houses, and preoccupied with their status as elites. In conclusion we might consider what this rounded picture has to offer the study of population change.

We would like to propose that a comparative study of elite demography would be a worthwhile scholarly undertaking for several reasons. First, it is surely not unique to Sicily that the expansion and contraction of elite families mirrored the development and then relative abandonment of productive resources. A striking parallel is suggested by T. H. Hollingsworth's well-known study of the English peerage (1957, 1964). Around 1760 this group, until then barely replacing itself, began to increase so rapidly that it quadrupled in size over the next hundred years. Because age at marriage changed little from the previous decades, Hollingsworth discounts it as a factor in this transition. Declining mortality, specific to privileged classes until the late nineteenth century, was influential. Most significant, however, was a rise in the number of nobles' sons who married and a sharp increase in completed family size from a mean of 3.5 to a mean of 5.0.

The full development of the expansionist pattern coincided with England's version of the agricultural changes which, in modified form, reached Sicily several decades later: enclosures protected by government policy, high wheat prices which a government bounty on exports

helped to stabilize, and an intensified use of land. Taken together these changes, particularly when considered with the noticeably expanded state apparatus that nourished them, lead one to seek relationships between demographic and political-economic phenomena that go beyond the largely demographic analysis of Hollingsworth. In addition, they push one to look for yet other parallels, including a possible parallel in the forming English gentry, for whom the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century also constituted a phase of buoyant expansion. According to the architecture historian Mark Girouard, the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were the “Golden Age” of the English country gentleman’s house, with its many informal gardens and rooms that lent atmosphere to house parties and a new, romantically inspired, courtship mode (Girouard 1978: 213–45). Lawrence Stone’s account of family history similarly pinpoints the latter part of the eighteenth century as a time of change in infant care within the privileged classes. In the English case, however, elite women were not turning to wet nurses, but just then beginning to drop them in favor of maternal breastfeeding (Stone 1979: 269–73). That they could do this without lengthening the interval between children no doubt reflects the simultaneous development of dairying “industries” supplying fresh milk to local populations, and the 1750 invention of the baby bottle as a conveyance for supplementary food (see Ryerson 1961; Beaver 1973).

A second reason for pursuing comparative elite demography is the possibility that Sicily’s *civili* were far from unique in their tendency to generate more offspring than could possibly succeed them to positions of wealth and power. In the above account, we suggested a relationship between this tendency and the group’s factious and competitive political style, acute in periods of resource contraction, but always a noteworthy characteristic, as the odiousness and rancor of the bossism period attest. Perhaps succession struggles and faction formation are an integral part of the population dynamics of elite families, leading to what might be called ruling-class segmentation, or the throwing off of cadet sons to colonize distant peoples and places.

David Herlihy’s analysis of the violent factional feuds that disrupted Tuscan cities in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is one case study that encourages comparison. According to Herlihy, moralists of that time expounded upon the “greed, anger, irascibility, volatility, hate, discord, desire, and lust” of a group they considered to be per-

petrators of disorder: young, unmarried men of the urban upper class. A careful look at demographic data exposes the household interactions that produced these young men. For, in spite of long-delayed marriages for men, though assisted by early marriages for women, “the richest males were the most prolific group in society in producing and rearing children” (Herlihy 1972: 144). The result was a large and growing cohort of youths, constrained to delay marriage for economic reasons, and having no outlet for their sexual energies other than in antisocial acts. Born to dominate, they preyed upon married women and widows and were also wildly factious among themselves (Herlihy 1972: 144).

A third reason to examine elite demography in a comparative framework has to do with the potential significance of intergroup relations for reproductive regimes in populations that are socially stratified. For, although elite families represent but a small minority of such populations, the extent of their influence is rarely proportional to numbers. Thus, Sicilian *civile* of the 1860s through 1890s held out to a middle sector of artisans, tradesmen, and better-off peasants a rising demand for locally produced or crafted goods, the more so as they constructed their *case civili* and flaunted their eliteness *in situ*. Perhaps this rising demand encouraged families of the middle sector to emulate the *civile* ideal of multiple offspring—a consequence that would help account for the coincidence of a rapidly growing gentry class with a rapidly growing overall population at a time when rural landless and land-poor, so often thought responsible for demographic “explosions,” were in fact having difficulty forming families because of high mortality. Our data from Villamaura are as yet preliminary, but they do suggest that until the turn of the century, middle- and upper-stratum families contributed more to overall population growth than families in the lowest stratum, even when the latter displayed earlier marriages for women. The same may well be true of certain phases of growth in other populations.

In the twentieth century, Sicily’s population continued to grow, but *civile* families did not, ending the correspondence between elite behavior and general trends that characterized the preceding period. For, in this phase of growth, upper- and middle-stratum families began to adopt coitus interruptus as a deliberate and self-conscious means of birth control, while some of the destitute landless produced ten or more living children. Yet even here, understanding the top of the social hierarchy adds something to one’s picture of the whole. De-



scendants of Villamaura's proletarian families portray the gentry of the early twentieth century as having withheld information about family limitation out of a combined interest in the progeny of the poor whom they hired as servants, and contempt for their very existence. In the words of an eighty-year-old woman, "the *civile* families reproduced with their brains, but we were condemned to keep our eyes closed like animals." This statement, with all that it implies about the complexities of population change when the behavior of the rich and powerful is included as a variable, further reinforces the call for a comparative study of elite ideas and actions vis-à-vis biological and social reproduction.

#### NOTE

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# The Dissolution of the Ruling Class in Twentieth-Century Sicily<sup>1</sup>

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Our first paper in this series described a process of class and elite formation in nineteenth-century Sicily. This essay tells a different story, about the dissolution of local and regional power blocs in the twentieth century. We will chronicle the shift from a landed-gentry class which could dominate both political and economic arenas, to much more fluid and diffuse political and economic formations.

An elite is defined as a tightly knit group of people who intentionally combine to direct the allocation of valued resources in a community. Implicit in this definition is the assumption of continuity—that once these groups are formed, they attempt to persevere, taking particular steps to promote their own security and status. Local elites in nineteenth-century Sicily were not only economic and political dominants, but they also engaged in a variety of sumptuary and symbolic practices to foster solidarity and legitimate power in the eyes of others. Economic, political, and cultural power and practice converged in the *civile* elites. That convergence no longer exists.

The political leaders of postwar Sicily are very different from their forerunners, the *civile* bosses of the late nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries. While intense factional disputes divided the bosses into opposing groups who alternated in power, they all shared the same class position and promoted the same class interests vis-à-vis the rest of the population. Contemporary political parties are not so homogeneous. Not only are there identifiable ideological differences between left, right, and center parties, there is considerable variation within the memberships of each. Indeed, most of the major parties are divided into ideological factions, called *correnti*, headed by prominent “patrons.” As a result, political decision making largely involves steering a cautious course between diverse and contradictory interests.

Today’s party cadres, as distinct from the *civile* bosses of the past, are recruited from varied social backgrounds, even within the same parties and *correnti*. As such they do not participate in a homogeneous elite subculture, reinforced by intermarriage, similar schools and clubs, exchanges of hospitality, and shoulder rubbing on ritual occasions. Although such a subculture could emerge in the future, there do not appear to be sufficient concentrations of either political or economic power to underwrite the cultural changes that would be required. In the absence of solidarity, homogeneity, and a distinctive subculture, leadership groups today look more like Gramsci’s description of the nineteenth-century “Action Party”—a national coalition of “diverse base not derived from any historical class” and without sufficient powers of attraction to initiate concrete programs (1971: 57–65). Within such a coalition, there are contending cabals or cliques, but whether the term *elite* is appropriate for such groups is an open question. At issue will be the extent to which the power of dominant cliques transcends very local functional domains, the coherence of these cliques, and their continuity in time.

An important problem is at stake, for the give and take among diverse political groupings at the local, regional, and perhaps even national levels of Italian government today would appear to confirm the “decomposition thesis” which, following Anthony Giddens (1974: 2), might be summarized as follows: in advanced capitalist societies, “the ruling class has ceded place to a more amorphous and differentiated set of ‘leadership groups’” as a consequence of several processes: the increased fragmentation and diversification of its interests, the fusion of its members with a growing white-collar “middle class” as the boundaries between these two groups become blurred, and an overall process of “embourgeoisment,” which effectively neutralizes and defuses class

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antagonisms. Basically a sociological model of changing class relations, the thesis articulates closely with the work of political scientists who, in the tradition of Robert Dahl, trace the development of political pluralism since World War II—again in the advanced capitalist societies.

This roseate view of class relations and political power in the contemporary West has been challenged by the approaches of such contemporary theorists of the capitalist state as Miliband (1969) and Poulantzas (1973, 1976). Building upon Gramsci's insight that power is exercised through ideological and moral leadership, as well as through economic and military dominance, they explore the myriad of subtle ways through which a ruling class penetrates the civil society over which it rules. Far from being disaggregated, and despite its internal divisions (which are many), the industrial capitalist bourgeoisie, aided by state power, has learned to maneuver more effectively in recent decades. Through education, the media, and other cultural channels, it has conditioned the "popular democratic masses" to accept the fundamental parameters of capitalist accumulation. This acceptance is not simply a consequence of mystification or false consciousness; it flows from the elite's deliberate effort to meet mass demands and aspirations, at least part way. As Jessop, reviewing the work of Poulantzas, suggests, a bourgeois power bloc "maintains hegemony by articulating popular democratic struggles in a way that sustains the bourgeoisie rather than revolution" (Jessop 1977: 368). That the outcome looks like plural democracy should not mislead us into thinking that the ruling class has "decomposed." On the contrary, a relatively well-consolidated ruling class orchestrates the political process so as to rule by consent, as well as by constraint.

For anyone who has had difficulty reconciling plural democratic models with the realities of class-based inequalities in modern industrial societies, the approach of Poulantzas and others is certainly welcome. But the issue for peripheral regions such as Sicily is not so simple as to be dealt with by either the "decomposition thesis" or the "hidden elite" model. Perhaps the problem is less whether elite dissolution or elite consolidation is taking place, but when and at what levels these processes occur, and in what relation to each other. It is our view that in twentieth-century Sicily, there has been a gradual breakup of elite control of critical resources, but that this decomposition probably coexists with, and is an integral part of, the consolidation of

control outside the island—in metropolitan centers of the world economy as well as the national centers of northern Italy. The relationship which governs these joint processes is an outgrowth of the unfolding international division of labor, for in the twentieth century, Sicily has come increasingly to specialize as a labor exporter to regions of Europe, America, and elsewhere during periods when these distant regions are engaged in industrial growth. The result is that today, contending, compromising, and competing groups of local and regional leaders have so little to lead, and so small a chance of altering the current path of change, that it seems a mistake to think of them as elites. Certainly no group has successfully initiated and followed through on developmental programs which, when viable, could alter a region's relationship to other regions so as to affect the processes of specialization and accumulation significantly. Elsewhere we have described the many failed attempts at agrarian transformation and reform in Sicily (Schneider and Schneider 1976). It is against that background of the island's inability to develop viable exports, other than human labor, in the twentieth century, that we proceed here.

In effect this paper seeks to describe the conditions under which ruling elites decompose and are replaced by shifting coalitions and temporary ruling cliques. Two major factors are discussed: one, the configuration of power related to long-term processes of state formation and capitalist accumulation at the national level; the other, the mode of production in the region at the present time. We imply that, had national state formation and capitalist development been stronger and more forceful over the last hundred years in Italy as a whole, one might expect national-level institutions to have penetrated Sicily more effectively and to have reproduced, in regional and local arenas, political systems that were isomorphic to the national elite structure. Because in actuality both processes were fraught with continual setbacks, such "nation-oriented" leadership groups, guardians, and promoters of national elite interests have not emerged. Instead, power in Sicily is dispersed among the various heads of the various political parties—as indeed it is to some extent nationally, also.

Today's regional economy also disperses power, defined as control over resources. Having shifted from the export of agricultural products, which it did until the turn of the century, to the export of labor as the principal, if not the only, means to earn foreign exchange, the organization of production within Sicily has considerably changed. In

contrast to wheat, which was produced on vast latifundia cultivated by proletarianized peasants, surplus labor comes out of social relations that are disaggregated, and relatively egalitarian. Other economic sectors, such as the construction industry, which are related to labor exports because they depend upon laborers' remittances, are also dispersed in their organization. Thus today's island economy for the most part escapes the kind of monopolization and control of basic resources which characterized land tenure until a few decades ago. Were this situation different, one might expect a bourgeoisie of modern dimensions to replace the old *civile* classes of landowners, both in the private and in the public sectors. Given the extent to which regional resources are dispersed, however, no such group has emerged.

The absence of concentrated economic and political power in post-war Sicily reinforces the assessment that power is plurally held—that, within the region, the decomposition thesis is a closer approximation of reality than a model which posits a hidden ruling class. It is important, however, to specify the limits of the decomposition thesis, which does not focus our attention on the world economy as a whole. Once that world economy becomes the focus of attention, the meaning of decomposition begins to change. At the very least, it ceases to have implications which are optimistic in the long run. For Sicily, where decomposition is bought at the price of migration as a way of life, where problems of severe under- and unemployment have never been solved, and where returned migrants have difficulty finding a viable economic niche, it is probably safer to worry than to applaud.

#### THE IMPACT OF A WEAK STATE ON REGIONAL AND LOCAL POWER

One possible basis of elite formation is the power which local people can develop as representatives of the state. Here we will examine the historical outlines of state formation and capitalist development in Italy, arguing that, in general, state power could not support solidary and monolithic local elites if these elites did not also monopolize control over local production. Indeed, elsewhere we have suggested that the power of local economic dominants in the nineteenth century contributed to the weakness of a state presence in western Sicily (Schneider and Schneider 1976).

*State Formation  
and Capitalist Development  
in Historical Perspective*

Antonio Gramsci's interpretation of the *Risorgimento*, the unification of Italy, as recorded in his *Prison Notebooks* (1971), centers around the inability of Mazzini's and Garibaldi's Action Party to initiate policy or exercise the "will to lead." Supposedly a "party" of the new bourgeoisie, this class-political formation was actually infiltrated and manipulated by an older and more coherent ruling bloc, the Moderate Party of north Italian landowners and financiers. *Trasformismo*, the name given to this Moderate manipulation of the Action Party, widened the base of the ruling class, but only so far as to embrace new bourgeois segments, particularly the rising southern *civili* and north Italian steel and textile manufacturers. The great mass of the popular-democratic forces of society, as well as the small but growing proletariat, remained outside the arena of bourgeois political expansion, and outside of the newly formed state. As people of that time remarked, the *Risorgimento* of 1860 made Italy, but not Italians.

The impact of the exclusion was greatest in the South, and Gramsci was particularly critical of the Action Party's failure to acknowledge the plight of southern peasants and plan for agrarian reform. Contrasting party leaders with the French Jacobins, whom they resembled in certain other respects, he observed how few steps they took to integrate town with country or (since in Italy one can project this dichotomy onto a regional plane), North with South. As a result of these failures at integration, Italy entered the twentieth century with a "narrow, skeptical, and cowardly" ruling stratum at the top, and its popular masses alternating between "sullen passivity" and endemic rebellion.

Characteristically, the bourgeoisie severely repressed worker organizations. It also moved very hesitantly to expand the suffrage, permitting modest steps to be taken in that direction in 1882, but only instituting universal adult male suffrage on the eve of World War I. (Women gained the vote after World War II.) Meanwhile, the Vatican retained its influence over the Italian people and, by the end of the century, backed the formation of a populist Catholic movement which aimed at enhancing the position of Catholic institutions through the political process. This movement, a forerunner of the Christian Dem-

ocratic Party, also became the instrument of bourgeois rule, but since the bourgeoisie did not initiate it, and left the church with the task of organizing the social base, Christian Democracy in Italy must be read as a symptom of industrial bourgeois weakness rather than strength (see Gramsci 1971: 55–90).

The sources of this weakness are much debated. Liberal historians and economists generally trace it to the immaturity of Italian entrepreneurs and manufacturers of the nineteenth century, and to the overly heavy involvement of the state in economic development, especially during the protectionist period after 1880. According to this view, best exemplified in the work of Rosario Romeo (1963, 1970), the Italian state coddled industrial initiatives which were congenitally weak, and prevented the unfettered operation of market forces from eliminating those firms that were least viable. It thereby helped perpetuate an industrial sector jammed with inefficient and obsolete enterprises, able to hang on by virtue of political, rather than economic, credibility.

More recent analyses have criticized the liberal assumption that, left on their own in the marketplace, many firms would have learned to swim strongly against the tide. Nineteenth-century Italy was, after all, an underdeveloped country in relation to France and England—an exporter of agricultural produce and unrefined fibers, and an importer of manufactures and foreign capital. Under these conditions of uneven development and late industrialization, protectionism and state capitalism were probably inevitable, and in any case only a symptom of congenital weakness, not its cause (see Schneider and Schneider 1976). Thus Guido Baglione concludes that early entrepreneurs in Italy were no less mature than their counterparts elsewhere, but that, given the context of Italy's backwardness vis-à-vis North Atlantic Europe, their need for state intervention and political protection was so great as to induce them to accept the continuing presence of precapitalist political institutions: the royal court, the army, and the aristocracy. Precisely as it failed to sever itself from the old "establishment," because it needed that establishment to survive, the bourgeoisie renounced the opportunity to assume moral and ideological leadership as a class (Baglione 1974: 98–99). Their choice (if it was a choice) resulted in certain gains—above all the political cover of the state—and certain losses—continual disharmony among themselves, and the lack of effective leadership in society.



To complement Baglione's argument, there is evidence that the state apparatus was itself too weak for the task. Italy was unified through a series of wars; yet its new political agencies had great difficulty enforcing conscription and mobilizing a standing army. Even more damaging were the fiscal crises which overwhelmed the young state from the outset. War debts from the unification struggle totaled over 400 million lire, including 263 million in indemnities to Austria. The state assumed over 2 billion lire in debts from preexisting regional polities as they were incorporated into the Italian nation, plus pensions and other obligations owed to the personnel of these governments. In addition, the state incurred large debts, partially foreign, in building an infrastructure for economic development. Between 1871 and 1880, for example, 14 billion lire went into the construction of railroads alone. The burden of these debts and the interest on them, plus the extraordinary continued expenses associated with the process of unification, drove the state to institute fiscal measures that identified it to most people as a rapacious tax collector (Sereni 1968: 11–13).

The severe financial burdens of the Italian state had important consequences for its relationship to the bourgeoisie. Although segments of this class turned to the state for aid and protection, the latter was beholden to the domestic and foreign financial establishment that held its notes, and was in no position to nurture bourgeois unity. As a theoretical abstraction, the capitalist state provides a framework for capital accumulation through various fiscal, political, and repressive actions (see Jessop 1977). In the reality of nineteenth-century Italy, however, competing firms cannibalized the state without ever coming to terms with each other. As recently as September 1978, Alberto Martinelli is reported to have characterized Italy's industrial class as a "weak bourgeoisie," divided by "tensions between private and public, between capital and labor-intensive, between import and export oriented industries as well as factions based on . . . size and differences in technological sophistication" (Nilsson 1979).

Historically, a leadership vacuum at the national level did not preclude the emergence of quite coherent, solidary regional power blocs—the *civile* class in Sicily being a case in point. It did, however, encourage a pattern of political mobilization that depended upon the exchange of patronage for votes. In the preceding essay, we touched on how, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, coalitions

of national leaders approached regional political bosses who, as a consequence of the downward flow of protection and rewards, were each in a position to deliver several hundred loyal voters at the polls. This pattern of patronage for votes still characterizes the relationship between national elites and local citizens to a very large extent, as illustrated by Sidney Tarrow's excellent analyses of the Italian party system (1977; see also Allum 1973 and Chubb 1978). According to Tarrow, the Italian state is a "dispersed state," without the coherence of the French administrative model or the efficiency and modernity of its civil service (1977: 207). In such a state, political power means mobilizing a heterogeneous mass electorate, and the instrument for doing this is the allocation of public resources to private persons. The main conduit of that allocation is the party, not the official governmental hierarchy. Indeed, the offices of the government bureaucracy are "privatized" by their occupants, who often hold them in the first place because of past demonstration of loyalty to the party, or future promise. One often hears it said, for example, that the Christian Democrats have "captured" the Bureau of Public Works, or that the Republicans control the Ministry of Education, which means that the resources of each agency will be utilized to "*sistemare clienti*"—to find jobs and other benefits for clients.

Being in a position to take care of clients through an ample distribution of employment opportunities and benefits of the state is considered crucial to the political leaders of all parties, including the Communist Party, and to the leaders of the *correnti* within the parties as well. One can thus imagine the many parties and *correnti* competing with each other to "colonize" the various agencies, ministries, and departments of the state. The party which, until quite recently, has done this most successfully is the Christian Democratic Party, which has governed Italy since the war by forming broad, interclass alliances, and by distributing patronage to individuals. Although this party speaks, at least through some of its *correnti*, for important segments of the northern bourgeoisie, its vote-getting strategies have worked best and most consistently in the South and Sicily (Tarrow 1977). We will see in the following section that party activists rather than government officials (although the two are often the same) also dominate the political process in Sicily, and that Christian Democrat activists have the key positions in most places.

*Patronage and Political Power  
in Contemporary Sicily*

In the 1960s, the Sicilian regional land reform agency spent approximately one-third of its budget on administrative positions (a budget that was supposed to fund the expropriation, redistribution, and transformation of land). In Catania, the City Planning Agency (*Ufficio Tecnico*) employed 215 persons in the early 1970s, of whom 107 were technicians (engineers and draftsmen), and the remaining 108 were clerks and receptionists. This ratio of one clerk or receptionist for every technician compares unfavorably with the national norm of one to five. In the offices of the Catania provincial government, there were 1,011 persons employed, of whom more than half (625) occupied supervisory positions, and as many as 74 persons were employed in the provincial motor pool (Caciagli 1977: Ch. 5, 19–20). The pattern is similar all over Sicily and is especially pronounced in the regional government headquarters in Palermo. There it is a standing joke (pun intended) that offices have more functionaries than desks (see Chubb 1978: 180).

Between the civil service opportunities for employment, the state-supported or state-protected economic enterprises and projects, and the widely available subsidies, benefits, abatements, contributions, and so on, the public sector might constitute a critical resource base for a political elite to control. In fact, however, there are many competing “welfare brokers” at all levels. In every parish, in every town, there is someone who can at least claim to be properly connected and who makes part or all of his living helping others apply for their share of the patronage. In Villamaura, there are six to a dozen places where people can go for help in filing applications for benefits (depending upon the nature of the benefits). There are also many free-lance professionals to assist in this task: municipal doctors, the town veterinarians, notaries public, local *mafiosi*, pharmacists, landlords, and priests. Some of these people put themselves out for the sake of kinship or friendship, but others, the *mafiosi* in particular, keep track of the obligations incurred. In return, many (but not all) ask for the promise of votes for particular parties or candidates.

Although professionals and *mafiosi* mediate the distribution of patronage, and to some extent mobilize electorates, it is the officers of the trade unions and the activists in the parties who are most visible

## Twentieth-Century Sicily

in these tasks. Their visibility, in fact, extends to organizing demonstrations in favor of welfaristic state intervention. Within days of a hailstorm or flood, for example, thousands of people will march to demand government indemnification. These bursts of collective activity do not signify a meaningful change in the relations we are describing, however. The funds, when they are forthcoming, usually become part of household economies where they are diverted to immediate consumption, just as if the organizers of the demonstration had been negotiating for individuals, or individual families, all along.

The party in its regional, no less than in its national, setting thus becomes the vehicle through which public resources find their way to private uses. The party's ward offices (the *sezioni*) function as welfare offices, collecting and forwarding individual claims and forms. And party activists of all political "colors" compete to control this process, the lines of conflict being drawn between the various parties and between the *correnti* within them. Activists must also compete for control with professionals and *mafiosi*, who may or may not have close political party connections. (The great majority of activists are themselves professionals, and a few are no doubt *mafiosi*.) It would appear, however, that all of the *correnti* in all of the government parties have some claim to the state's beneficence, and some bundle of jobs, protection, favors, and patronage to offer in exchange for votes, although clearly there is never an even distribution of patronage control among all the contenders, and the configuration changes over time. The extent to which control over patronage—control over the agencies and assets of government—can be monopolized is variable. The same transformative processes have had different careers and outcomes in different communities. Taking advantage of the studies of Chubb on Palermo (1978) and Caciagli et al. on Catania (1977), as well as our own research in Villamaura, we will examine this range of variation, beginning with Palermo, where power has been most highly concentrated in the hands of a relatively stable ruling clique.

### Palermo

Palermo, the regional capital of Sicily, was governed before World War II by *civile* landowning notables, members of a propertied class, who had a base and a personal following that were independent of their position in a political party. In other words, the notable brought

his following to politics, and did not find it there. Notables formed an elite that combined political with economic power (Chubb 1978: 101). In the period immediately following World War II, the Christian Democrats continued to recruit leaders and candidates from among the local notables, but gradually, “as the party consolidated its hold on power, it attracted as well many ex-fascist functionaries and middle class ‘intellectuals’ seeking positions in the public offices and agencies controlled by the DC” (Chubb 1978: 120). The party (and the local administration) was increasingly inhabited by “young Turks,” petty-bourgeois officials whose career and political strength were rooted in the party itself. This process, occurring throughout the South (see also Allum 1973; Caciagli et al. 1977; and Tarrow 1977), was fostered by the transformation of the DC into a modern mass party, with a multitude of new party sections, and vastly increased membership. The new politicians could both create and enhance their position with the party by finding and enrolling new members, and by enlisting and cultivating the loyalty of as many “*tesserati*” (card holders) as possible. The *quid pro quo* for this loyalty was patronage or the promise of patronage. Thus the local office (federation or section) of the party, and the functionary who mans that office, supplant the old-time notables as conduits of state-originated welfaristic investment.

When a few people manage to gain control over the party machinery they may form a ruling clique, directing the allocation of welfare, public works contracts, licenses, franchises, variances, and so forth. Without doubt they are also in a strategic position to enhance their own economic condition and that of their kinsmen, friends, and clients. But the resulting “elite,” as powerful as it may be, does not enjoy the convergence of economic and political power with sumptuary styles that was characteristic of the *civile* elites described in the first paper. There is little of the organized class-based sumptuary behavior that was characteristic of the nineteenth-century elites. According to one well-placed informant, there is even no longer an elite club (*circolo*) for high society.

Even in the case of Palermo as described by Chubb—“a highly developed political machine which has extended its control into virtually all centers of economic and political power, both public and private” (1978: 27)—actual control over the machine does not remain in the same hands long enough to pass from one generation to another; some participants enjoy a meteoric rise to power, and quite possibly

just as rapid a descent, and much of the economy is so fragmented into a myriad of small firms and petty activities that no would-be elite could control it. In 1952, the municipal government of Palermo was captured by the Christian Democratic Party (DC), controlled by a small circle of old-style notables—landlords, professionals, and high clergy. They acted to maximize their own interests and those of the church to monopolize building and roadway construction, real estate speculation, and the allocation of government jobs and contracts. But population growth and the expansion of the state and its organs combined to create new opportunities for the foxes to rise. In effect, the ruling class expanded and became more heterogeneous as audacious and sharp-witted newcomers moved into the inner economic and political networks, while creating new networks of their own. Francesco Vassallo began his career as a carter in nearby Tommaso Natale in the 1930s. He was a building contractor by 1952, when he won a lucrative contract to construct a sewage system. To complete this work he received substantial credits from the *Banco di Sicilia*, even though he had no prior experience in the industry (Chubb 1978: 253ff). By the mid-1960s Vassallo dominated the construction field (in the sense that his firm was the largest), and was prominent in other business and political ventures.

In 1951, at the age of 27, Vito Ciancimino, protégé of the then national minister of the interior, Bernardo Mattarella, won a concession for the transport of railroad cars in the city of Palermo. He was awarded the contract to supply this service in spite of his lack of capital and experience. Within a decade he had become Palermo's commissioner of public works. As recently as 1978, he was still a powerful figure in Christian Democratic politics, even though his public role had diminished as a result of widespread denunciation of his mafia connections and support (Chubb 1978: 260). Until he is challenged successfully by some other rising star, he will likely exert considerable influence by virtue of his control over a large part of the DC machine.

What makes the "machine" powerful in Palermo, even as people like Vassallo and Ciancimino move in and out of its command posts, is its ability to concentrate and allocate state patronage, but it may be only in Palermo—the regional capital—that the bounteous gifts of the state are funneled through a narrow enough channel to permit a degree of centralization. Here, in other words, a Christian Democratic clique exhibits a certain degree of coherence, concerted action, and control

even if it is not an “elite”—its organization being fueled by the vastly increased presence of the state, and the related rapid growth of the city.

### *Catania and Villamaura*

If anything, the process of decomposition is more advanced elsewhere in Sicily. Most commonly, although controlled by the Christian Democratic Party, sometimes in coalition with weaker centrist parties, municipal administrations have exhibited considerable fluidity and shifting leadership cadres over the years. Thus in approximately twenty-eight years of postwar elected municipal government in Catania, Sicily's second-largest city in population, under constant DC rule, there were twenty-two different administrations formed, and fifty-two different people who occupied the positions of mayor or city councilman (Caciagli 1977: Ch. 8, 19). As in Palermo, during the early part of the period most of the mayors and councilmen were local notables (landed gentry) and/or “Catholic” leaders whose power derived from their close association to the church and its political backing. Later, between 1960 and 1975, the balance shifted toward a more heterogeneous group of party activists, whose political life was born and nurtured in the party, and whose entire adult activity is given over to party matters. Their power, such as it is, resides in the party, and not in the land or the church. Although most of these people were trained and certified in the professions (law, medicine, teaching, engineering, etc.), and many have occupied sinecures in government at various times in their careers, their principal activity is party work, in one capacity or another. “For the last fifteen years in this area, . . . the Christian Democrats of Catania tend to be full time politicians,” although most are not technically functionaries, employed and salaried by the party (Caciagli 1977: Ch. 8, 24). To these petty-bourgeois types, party life offers diverse opportunities for making a living. Many have been placed in token positions in government or the private sector. Others find that their law, engineering, or commercial firms enjoy considerable indirect benefits from their active participation in party affairs. As substantial landholdings and long attachment to the church ceased to be prerequisite for political leadership, the ranks of the Christian Democrat leaders swelled considerably, an aspect of elite dissolution discussed above.

## *Twentieth-Century Sicily*

An oddly similar pattern occurred in Villamaura, even though its history was atypical for Sicily, as it was one of the few places to give strong and persistent electoral support to the Communist Party, the town having been administered since 1946 by the PCI, alone or in coalition with the socialists. Certain features of the local ecology, patterns of land use, and class history suggest why this should have been so. A relatively large belt of arable valley land around the town, and the division of communal territory into several moderate-sized latifundia, rather than one or two giant feudal estates, encouraged the rise of a proportionately large upper class (the *civili*) and a substantial group of propertied middle peasants. We think that these groups in turn supported a disproportionately large artisan class. In the late nineteenth century, socialism took root among these artisans.

Although the Communist administrators of present-day Villamaura are ideologically committed to the long-term goals of socialism in Italy, they must "wait with calm for the revolution." The party has compiled an admirable record of honest and efficient administration, especially in public works projects, which is also quite atypical for Sicily. But the new political activists do not differ markedly in class background or mobility patterns from their counterparts in the cadres of the Christian Democratic party and, like their cohorts to the right, they look to the party as a job sinecure. Not surprisingly, there are more people of working-class and peasant origins who become activists or party professionals in the left parties, but the majority of the new leaders would seem to be children of artisans and *professionisti*. Like that of the young activists of the Christian Democrats, their ideological commitment may be genuine, but they are also looking to the party for a living. Also like the Christian Democrat leadership groups, their numbers have expanded considerably in the last ten years.

### LOCAL ECONOMIES AND POWER

#### *Welfaristic State Investments*

Since the war, and especially in the last two decades, Sicily and southern Italy have been on the receiving end of a small flood of subsidies and contributions from the national state, and from such supranational agencies as the Marshall Plan funds and the EEC. These include grants and loans in aid of industrial, commercial, and agrarian



initiatives; indemnities to people who suffer losses from natural disasters; reparations to the Sicilian region for past exploitation and inequities in the distribution of national resources; monies to administer land reform and other public works programs; medical and health insurance programs; special tax abatements (to earthquake victims, for example); unemployment benefits; government-sponsored pensions; and locally administered charity.

It is difficult to estimate the magnitude of these funds, and impossible to know what proportion reach their intended destination, or accomplish their intended tasks. Of the towns which were not badly damaged by the earthquake of 1968, for example, some have nonetheless enjoyed a steady stream of contributions, tax abatements, public works allocations, and subsidies in the intervening decade, while the people whose towns were actually leveled, or made uninhabitable, by the disaster, are still living in barracks. Moreover, because the trade-union movement is generally fragile in the South and Sicily, large categories of people such as construction workers do not receive the benefits regularly expected by their counterparts in the North. It is also the case that any modern state provides some or all the services and benefits listed above to some or all of its people. Yet, one has the distinct impression that in Sicily, a large proportion of families depends upon these forms of state assistance as a significant, and in some cases unique, source of income. Similar characterizations of contemporary Sicily as "welfarist" are found in the work of two scholars at the University of Catania, R. Catanzaro (1978: 9-50), and E. Reyneri (1977).

All over Sicily, there is today a proliferation of economic activities that people have organized specifically in order to take advantage of state contributions, subsidies, public works contracts, government concessions, and other forms of assistance. Many activities that would appear to be productive enterprises in their own right actually fall into this category, the state subsidy being of greater significance than any profits earned. Thus an agrarian "cooperative" is formed under a special law which offers an outright grant of 70 percent of the cost of agricultural machinery to rural cooperatives. The members of the cooperative (usually no more than the nine required by the law) engage in no collective agriculture other than to operate and rent out the services of the machinery they purchase, perhaps limited to one wheat combine. Employed in this manner, the machines do not increase pro-

ductivity in wheat, although they do replace workers who are lost to emigration. A training program in road construction or reforestation is formed to provide laborers with a minimum of fifty-two days of employment per year, so that the laborers can qualify for unemployment benefits (some of the same workers are actually employed full time, off the books). In the same reforestation area there are acres of mountainside dotted with holes that were dug under contract by a private firm. They would have been planted with trees had the company not consumed the reforestation funds before the seedlings could be purchased and planted.

There are many other examples of phantom development projects: segments of superhighway which connect nothing with nowhere; a hydroelectric plant that is constructed along with an artificial lake but never put into service, because the water control agency cannot agree with the energy agency over jurisdiction and priorities for use of the water; aqueducts which are constructed but remain dry; factories and hotels which are built but never opened for lack of sufficient capital (the enterprising builder spent the subsidy and loan funds before the first employee could be hired). Many of these projects were intended to gainfully occupy hundreds of people, either directly or as a consequence of their contribution to some other aspect of economic growth. Never becoming self-sustaining, they have not served this purpose; yet the very process of countless false starts, failed attempts, phantom projects has made the state a significant "employer" in Sicily today. Along with its increased presence in the region has come an incredible proliferation of civil service jobs, and government employees are especially well endowed with various forms of welfaristic assistance, ranging from free passes on the national railway (even after retirement) to special payments for certain services (inspection trips, serving on institutional boards or examination committees, etc.), lavish severance bonuses and pensions, and low- or no-interest mortgage loans (see especially Chubb 1978: 188–89).

But it is not in the nature of such welfaristic state expenditure that it can support a stable local ruling elite for very long. The resources themselves are fragmented as the parties in the governing coalition and competing factions within the parties all struggle for a piece of the action. Furthermore, among the constituents there are many who have a legitimate claim to some benefits, even if they must activate the right combinations of friends and patrons to make good on their

claims. After all, it is important to the legitimacy of these funds that they are established ostensibly to provide for the urgent needs of many different categories of individuals within the population.

In Palermo, according to Chubb (1978), a handful of Christian Democratic politicians, aided and abetted by extortionist mafia cliques, managed to concentrate great political and economic power over a twenty-year period, principally because of the convergence there of state funds, rapid population growth, and activity in construction, goods, and services ancillary to the burgeoning regional government, wholesale and retail produce markets, and contraband. These activities, however, cannot be the basis for sustained economic development and, we would argue, could not be the sole basis for the perseverance of a coherent power elite. In fact, such an economy would be involutorial, composed essentially of people who exist by taking in each other's washing. There must therefore be some source of energy to supplement state contributions and payrolls, the production and export of some agrarian or industrial commodity. As Sicily's agriculture has been in crisis since the failure of the wheat market in the late nineteenth century, its major export commodity, and a crucial element in its economy, is migrant labor.

### *Emigration and Power in Sicily*

Three decisive events occurred in the late nineteenth century to transform Sicily from a source of wheat to a source of unskilled labor in world markets. One was a decline in the export market for wheat; another was the increased availability of cheap (as opposed to exclusive luxury) manufactures for mass consumption, forcing artisans into the labor market; and the third was a period of marked population growth. The result was a large surplus labor force which could easily be mobilized and moved to centers of industrial and urban growth. There were few, if any, local alternatives to migration, as attempts at land reform and industrialization, beginning as early as the Bourbon *bonifica* in the 1830s and continuing through the postwar land reforms, did little to alter the productivity of a backward peasant economy. The primary functions of these reforms were to mitigate political unrest, and to provide a generous share of public works funds to the construction industry.

Between 1875 and 1925, almost two million people migrated from

Sicily. This migratory flow took up again after World War II, and continues to this day. In the period from 1951 to 1971, there was a net loss of about one million (Barbagallo 1973: 253). Both migrations were at least partially pendular—many migrants did not take up permanent residence in the host places (perhaps one-third in the early cohorts, as many as 80 to 90 percent in the recent migrating groups). Rather, they journeyed back and forth as savings and circumstances allowed, or, after a period of years “in exile,” returned to settle definitively in the home country (see Ianni 1963; Renda 1963; Foerster 1969; Caroli 1973). Many of the migrants were single men who left parents, siblings, wives, and children behind; in effect commuting to work on a yearly, rather than a daily, cycle. So to complement the outward flow of laborers there was a constant influx of return migrants with their savings, as well as remittances from expatriates who remained abroad.

Sicilians who did settle permanently in foreign places created a considerable demand for Italian products, especially foodstuffs. They also sent money and gifts to relatives at home, subscribed to hometown newspapers, and made substantial contributions to such enterprises as hospitals, orphanages, and the annual festivals of the patron saint. Most broadly stated, the migrant population continued to be very much a part of the local and regional Italian economies, through property, commercial, and kinship relations. It is difficult to gauge the magnitude of the cash flow into Italy between 1875 and the present, but approximate data for a recent period, gathered by Constantino Ianni, make a convincing case for the critical importance of emigration to the Italian economy (Ianni 1963: 229–62). He argues that from 1953 to 1962 emigration remittances increased from 119 million dollars to 550 million dollars per year, and that these official figures could probably be doubled to arrive at a more accurate estimate of the actual inputs. In most years since 1870, emigration remittances are estimated at more than the annual deficit in Italy’s international balance of commercial payments. In other words, whatever Italy was losing in international trade was more than offset by the gain in emigration remittances (see Ianni 1963: 230–33). For the sake of simplicity, we will refer to all of the cash inputs that are contingent on emigration, as “emigration remittances,” as we seek below to examine the effect of these inputs on local economic and political organization.

Sicily’s major export is labor, in the form of fully socialized, literate,

adult men and women who emigrate temporarily in search of employment. Strictly speaking, labor, while an important factor in production, cannot be produced for export, but the analogy may help us understand the relationship between emigration and power in Sicily. If we treat labor as if it were such a commodity—as if it were constant rather than variable capital—then we can consider how the commodity is produced, and how its commerce is organized. The answer of course is that the basic unit of production is the family in the sending region. This being the quintessential cottage industry, the units of production are highly dispersed and localized, and no one except the primary producers themselves owns and controls the means of production. Furthermore, although the Italian state, foreign labor recruiters, and transportation companies have played an active role in encouraging or discouraging labor migration, there is no single agency that can effectively control that commerce, except possibly when the state seals the borders, as it did during both world wars. This critical export traffic then is highly decentralized, and while it can be regulated, it is essentially nonadministered. In other words, still following our analogy, it is not possible for any very limited set of people to monopolize control over the production and commerce of export labor.

Of course, the analogy, while useful, is invalid. Migratory labor is not an element of constant capital. It is variable capital, which is almost always produced domestically by families in households. If we recognize this we are forced to change the argument, but the conclusion remains the same. The production of variable capital (labor) is dispersed among so many household units. This process is socially determined, but again, it is not administered. The actual means of production, constant capital, are owned, controlled, and located far from these households, in the industrial core. It is there that concentration of economic power might produce an effective elite structure. In the peripheral, labor-producing regions the power field is more diffuse and fragmented. At the local level one would expect to find a plurality of petty “elites,” with little internal homogeneity, little mutual solidarity and coherence, and relatively little influence and continuity. This is because no one can base elite domination on control of the production and commerce in a valued resource when that resource is wage labor.

Emigration remittances underwrite the life-styles of Sicilian families directly or indirectly dependent on migration for an income; they are

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not concentrated and employed in the form of investment capital to increase productivity. Recent studies of return migrants confirm this point, indicating that returning migrants are more likely to put their savings in house construction than in the acquisition of land (Reyneri 1977). In one survey of Italian migration, covering Sicily and the South, the following emerged as destinations for remittances, in order of priority: (1) to aid the family remaining at home while the “breadwinner” emigrates; (2) to enlarge, modernize, construct, or acquire a house, usually in the place of origin; (3) to buy a piece of land, especially in a zone of small properties, primarily to display social status; and (4) to launch a small commercial enterprise, a retail outlet (bar, restaurant, or store), or a small-scale manufacturing activity. According to Livi Bacci, the great majority of emigrant savings end up in the first, and to some extent in the second categories; very little is channeled into the third and fourth categories (see FORMEZ 1976: 75).

### *The Construction Industry and Power*

Given that remittances aid families in achieving a better standard of living, often in the form of building a better house, they are an important component of a miniboom in retail trade and construction which has characterized the Sicilian economy over the last several years. New houses are important status markers (as well as more comfortable places to live), built according to many of the same criteria as the *civile* houses of the past, although scaled down in size, and with many mass-produced components. Not only are they designed with long hallways that separate the rooms and their uses from each other (even at a loss of light and ventilation), but there are also lavish bathrooms and kitchens, finished with glazed ceramic tiles and the most modern fixtures and appliances, so that visitors can assess at a glance the magnitude of their hosts' new affluence. This consumerism is manifest virtually throughout the class hierarchy, with appropriate differences in scale at different levels. The poorer families just build more slowly and modestly.

Of course, it was not only house construction that flourished in the postwar years but also the myriad of other economic activities that go along with it—public works in infrastructure, suppliers of building materials and construction equipment, surveyors, draftsmen, engi-

neers, attorneys, land brokers, and banks. The signs of this feverish activity were visible almost everywhere on the island—in the smallest interior towns as well as the largest coastal cities. Many people stood to profit by these developments, and some fortunes were made quickly. Land values in key locations increased rapidly, leading to windfall profits for some.

In Villamaura, the number of construction firms in 1977 was four times the number in 1965, with a corresponding increase in ancillary occupations. There was a wide range in the size and capitalization of these firms, from one master builder with a couple of apprentices and minimal equipment, to giant northern-based construction companies with many specialized employees at all skill levels deploying the most advanced heavy machinery. The latter were employed in the larger public works projects funded by the state. At the peak of the boom period it did not take much to become a construction impresario—a few skilled employees; a draftsman or engineer; enough capital, begged, borrowed, or stolen, to crank the operation up (it could become self-sustaining once it was in motion); and good connections in the critical government agencies. So there were contractors who had been draftsmen (*geometra*) or architects, others who had been stonemasons (*capomastri*), and still others who had no previous connection at all with the building trades. The single most important resource for these entrepreneurs was a network of influential and well-placed friends.

Without exception, the most successful impresarios were closely connected with the people who ran regional and subregional governments, people who could arrange zoning ordinances, variances from the ordinances, right-of-way rulings, provision of infrastructure, safety inspections, public works contracts, and funding. We have discussed elsewhere the famous case of Agrigento, a provincial capital of about 65,000 people, much of which collapsed under the weight of abusively constructed apartment buildings (Schneider and Schneider 1976: 214–16). Caciagli's recent work documents many of the same connections for the city of Catania (1977). Every project of any magnitude required permissions, *nulla oste*, and licenses from various municipal offices. A hostile administration could block any project, but a friendly administration made it possible to bend some rules and ignore others. Often the officials themselves were direct or indirect partners in the venture.

But neither the well-placed friends in government nor the impresarios themselves formed a homogeneous power bloc. Both categories

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were relatively heterogeneous and fluid. For it was not in the nature of construction activity that control over it could easily be concentrated in the hands of a few persons. So little capital was required to begin operations, and there was so much opportunity for rapid growth, that many people were encouraged to enter the field, and not a few of them were successful. The point is that this sector of the economy, like the distribution of welfarist funds, was not easily monopolized, and could not promote the formation of a solidary elite.

### *Conclusion*

In an article which we wrote with E. Hansen in 1972, we attempted to distinguish between dependence and development-oriented regional elites (Schneider, Schneider, and Hansen 1972: 345ff). It seemed clear to us then that elite structure at the local level would depend on the nature of the political and economic relations which linked one regional culture with others, and in particular the relations that joined advanced industrial metropolies with agrarian colonial or neocolonial hinterlands. In our book dealing with western Sicily (1976: 4–5), the concepts were clarified and wedded to I. Wallerstein's model of core and periphery in world systems. There again, the focus was on elite structure in a peripheral region, and there we argued that the odds were very much in favor of dependence elites:

Consistent with the distinction between modernization and development is a parallel distinction between types of political leadership group—in modernizing societies a *dependence elite* has a vested interest in continued subordination to foreign powerholders; in developing (or would-be developing) societies a *development elite* advocates severing connections, or altering connections with international markets in the interests of economic diversification and greater autonomy. . . . Given the realities of economic and political power in the twentieth century, however, the advantage usually lies with the dependence elite (1976: 4).

There are several aspects of this formulation that are problematic, not the least of which is the diffuse nomothetic quality of the concepts. What we wish to focus on here, however, is the assumption that one would find an elite structure in the peripheral regions, an assumption for which there is no logical a priori reason. It is certainly possible that a region that is peripheral to industrial core areas, and economically and politically subordinate to the core areas, might produce no



indigenous elite at all, if by elite, one means a relatively small group of persons who act in concert over a period of time to direct the allocation of strategic resources in some social formation.

In the case of Sicily, there were two possible bases for elite formation: elites could form and maintain power by exercising control over the means of production; and/or elites could exert hegemony by controlling state power and patronage at the local level. In the preceding essay we have argued that the late nineteenth-century ruling class did both in Sicily. In that period there was a genuine fusion of economic and political power vested in a landed gentry which controlled the production and export of wheat, minerals, and other primary products while simultaneously acting as a political broker to a national elite. The main thrust of this essay has been that neither of these conditions for elite formation endured to the middle of the twentieth century. With the demise of Sicilian agriculture in the late 1800s, migrant labor became the most strategic resource generated on the island, and its production and commerce could not be subject to monopoly control any more than the construction trades contingent on it. In Rome, meanwhile, there was a weak and fragmented state which could not alone be the basis for elite formation at the periphery. This may seem an odd conclusion to a paper prepared for a seminar on elite formation, but perhaps there is much to be learned about elites by analyzing their degeneration.<sup>2</sup>

## NOTES

1. The authors gratefully acknowledge that the research upon which this article was based was supported by grants from the American Philosophical Society, Fordham University, and the City University of New York.

2. This paper was begun in 1979 and completed in 1980. It is based on fieldwork and secondary sources all of which were completed prior to 1978. Thus it could not take into consideration important events in the development of the mafia during the past five years, as the rapid expansion of the heroin trade emanating from Palermo has affected the economy and almost certainly the political structure of the region.

# Oligopolistic Competition Among State Elites in Princely India<sup>1</sup>

LLOYD I. RUDOLPH

SUSANNE HOEBER RUDOLPH

Elites can be found in many domains—cultural, social, economic, and political—and with varying degrees of recognition and power across domains. Here we analyze one kind of political elite, state servants, in the setting of princely India under British paramountcy in the nineteenth century. Our unit of analysis is the bureaucratic lineage, a hybrid term that grafts Weber's understanding of institutionalized formal rationality onto the conceptual universe of kinship and family.<sup>2</sup> Bureaucratic lineages or service families loyally served rulers and enjoyed their favor. But they did so, for the most part, in state or public activities rather than as the ruler's personal retainers or household servants. In this sense they were what Weber called patrimonial bureaucrats. The higher levels of princely state administration were staffed by particular lineages drawn from an identifiable pool of lineages.

In princely India under British paramountcy a necessary condition for eliteness in the political domain was birth in an appropriate social order. The hierarchical social orders of Rajputana subsumed class relations. The orders were closed but subject to change by internal mobility and by the addition of new categories. The sufficient condition

for eliteness was the favor of the ruler. In more open, egalitarian, and competitive societies, eliteness results from culturally valued and publicly recognized attributes, qualifications, or achievements.<sup>3</sup> The heuristic distinction between eliteness based on competition and achievement and eliteness based on birth and favor is important for establishing research strategies. It becomes problematic if it precludes attention to the effects of competition and competence on elites based on the initial advantages of birth or prevents examination of the advantages that birth (family) can provide where eliteness is based on competition. When we demonstrate, as we shall below, that the heuristic distinction is problematic, we do not merely repeat what Weber also recognized, that there are no "pure types" in actual historical settings. Rather, we find, and have argued at length elsewhere (Rudolph and Rudolph 1979), that patrimonial features are not, as Weber supposed, displaced in an evolutionary process by bureaucratic features and eliteness based on competition and achievement. Patrimonial features such as loyalty, personal authority, birth, and favor remain persistent aspects of contemporary bureaucratic administration and of eliteness.

Because the characteristic patterns of bureaucratic politics in the smaller authoritarian regimes of Asia have not been much attended to by social scientists, they have not been adequately taken into account in the analysis and explanation of state formation, elite formation and circulation, or the conduct of politics. The norms, practice, and consequences of lineage politics express societal and bureaucratic interests and constitute the principal element in the politics of India's princely states.

Incumbent elite lineages in Rajputana, like those in similar authoritarian Asian political systems, tried to establish monopoly control over their offices by appropriating them (Rudolph and Rudolph 1979: 4). Such efforts had at least two possible outcomes. In a number of nineteenth-century Asian regimes—Tokugawa Japan, Rana rule in Nepal, the Bhunang lineage under King Chulalongkorn in Thailand—the propensity to monopoly succeeded, at least for a time (see D. Adams 1977; Edwards 1977). Bureaucratic lineages were able to appropriate the state offices and power and to subordinate or exclude but rarely to eliminate competitors. Competing families, ready to challenge and replace incumbent lineages, remained eligible and available for senior office. It was very much in the ruler's interest to prevent any one lineage from gaining a monopoly so that he could maintain a

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pool of available candidates to constrain those in office and favor alternative incumbents in case the need or opportunity arose. More often than not, lineages were obliged to settle for a more modest outcome than monopoly, that is, to accept an oligopolistic sharing of the market of power, either simultaneously or over time. Oligopolistic competition and alternation of state service inhibited the growth of monopoly power by particular lineages and the social categories they might “represent.” Oligopolistic competition made it difficult to translate the vested interest of officeholding into appropriation of the authority and resources of the state.

### THE POLITICAL SETTING

Most of the princely states of Rajputana<sup>4</sup> were dominated by clans who believed themselves to be *kshatriyas*,<sup>5</sup> the warrior-rulers of the traditional Hindu social order. In 1818 Britain imposed treaties that allowed the Rajput kingdoms to retain control over domestic government and guaranteed their rulers against external and internal threats but took control over their external relations, including their use of armed forces (see Aitchison 1909). In time, Britain came to rule the rest of India directly, but in princely India (about two-fifths of the subcontinent) its rule was indirect. Indirect rule was expressed in the vague and ambiguous language and practice of paramountcy, a relationship whose meaning and consequences remained variable and ambiguous until its denouement in 1946–48 when the princely states were integrated into the two successor states of the British *raj*, India and Pakistan (Menon 1956).

Until independence in 1947, the society and politics of princely India remained distinct from the society and politics in directly ruled British India (Rudolph and Rudolph 1966). Paradoxically, both the principal source of change and the guarantor of a stable status quo was the paramount power.<sup>6</sup> Within the vague parameters set by the doctrine of paramountcy, the agents of the paramount power, from residents in princely state capitals to the viceroy in Delhi-Simla, responded to their own sense of imperial priorities and opportunities in the widely variegated local circumstances that characterized princely states.

Rajput domination was institutionalized in clan dynasties that ruled most Rajputana states and in *jagirs*, estates composed of revenue-

bearing villages, which dominated much of the countryside. Rajput rulers and *jagirdars* jointly controlled the most important economic resource, land, as well as the legitimate use of force. The domestic security, settlement of disputes, economic condition, and welfare of communities living under *jagirs* were to a considerable extent dependent on the goodwill and capacity of the *jagirdar* and his retainers and staff. *Jagirdars* were required to maintain at their expense horse, foot, and sometimes camel and elephant forces, partly for local use but formally for the use of the maharaja should he require them.

The maharaja's government administered the *khalsa*, revenue-bearing lands and villages directly under its control. The maharaja's authority over *jagir* lands was indirect and attenuated. The officials who governed the *khalsa* and staffed the state and court offices were drawn from families of a limited range of social categories that had established traditions of state service, although such "traditions," as we indicate below, were not always very old.

A state's servants constituted a patrimonial and political bureaucracy. They were a bureaucracy in that they were much more state functionaries than household servants or personal retainers.<sup>7</sup> What they did had a public character, and they occupied offices with identifiable responsibilities and jurisdictions. They were political in the sense that they made, interpreted, or implemented policy, played a representative as well as an instrumental role, and were key actors in the struggle for power within a limited political community. State servants were patrimonial because their claim to office often included a necessary hereditary condition and because loyalty to the ruler's house and person and the ruler's favor and loyalty to particular lineages were key bonds in the relations between rulers and state servants. They served a dynasty and the territorial community with which a dynasty was identified as well as a particular maharaja, and maintained their loyalty to the dynastic and territorial state even if they were out of favor with a particular ruler. For service families as for dynasties, it was the family, not the individual, and ideal and material interest over time, not the fortunes of the moment, that were primary.

There were twenty-two princely states in Rajputana when India became independent in 1947. Only the three largest, Jodhpur, Jaipur, and Udaipur, are discussed here. These three were the most important states; data concerning them were accessible to us; and they are sufficiently different to invite comparison.

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The patrimonial and political bureaucracy was located at the court whose ambit was defined by those public and private activities and ceremonies that involved the maharaja. Within the court, bureaucratic lineages occupied the senior public posts, particularly those of first minister, members of council (who often held responsible ministerial offices), and heads of principal departments. There were, of course, other important administrative aspects of the princely political orders. In another study, for example, we propose to examine *thikana* or *jagir* administration using the account books of *thikana* Bedla in Udaipur. Also important is *parganah* administration in the *khalsa* (crown lands) and the role of *hakims* and other local officials, whose offices often provided apprenticeship for higher positions (see Chandra and Gupta 1966: 33). Here we deal with bureaucratic lineages located at the apex.

### THE PROPENSITY TO MONOPOLY AND ITS OLIGOPOLISTIC OUTCOME

Examples from Jodhpur, Udaipur, and Jaipur illustrate patterns of oligopolistic competition. In Jaipur, two families tried and failed to establish something like monopoly control. Three Rajput families from the small estate of Peelva in Jodhpur belonging to a Champawat lineage of the Rathore clan raised themselves from modest beginnings in the 1850s to senior positions in the 1860s. They dominated the government of Maharaja Ram Singh of Jaipur in the 1870s when they occupied important ministerial posts, including that of first minister. They attempted to perpetuate their control by a variety of stratagems. One was to maneuver the adoption as the maharaja's successor of a member of a collateral branch of the ruling family. They anticipated that his succession would ensure their undisturbed control of the state's administration. Their anticipation proved incorrect when the new maharaja proved ungrateful. Babu Kanti Chander, a Bengali schoolteacher who had gained favor as the new maharaja's private secretary, succeeded in winning his confidence and, as a consequence, was able to found and entrench a competing lineage. Over twenty years, from 1881 to 1901, the babu, as the maharaja's first minister, used his control of resources, authority, and patronage in attempts to eliminate the Champawat lineage from Peelva. He confiscated some of their villages, charging them with malfeasance and disloyalty, and reduced their rank in the maharaja's court and household. Babu Kanti Chander's effort to

establish a lineage monopoly by passing on his office to his son failed, as had that of his opponents. The Champawats from Peelva held on to some of their offices and portions of their estates, and retained positions at court. In 1924, with the death of Maharaja Madho Singh and the creation of Man Singh's minority administration, the Champawats from Peelva regained considerable influence (Rudolph, Rudolph, and Singh 1975).

At Udaipur, Mehta Ram Singh, member of a well-established and distinguished indigenous bureaucratic lineage, succeeded his brother-in-law, Mehta Devichand, as *pradhan* in 1818. His forceful efforts to expand and consolidate his lineage's control of central and local posts were interrupted when he was ousted as *pradhan*. Reappointed *pradhan* in 1824, he served for seven years, during which time he was able to place a substantial number of relations and dependents in office. His capacity to raise funds to meet the payments for tribute to the British raj served him well. After 1818, when most Rajput princely states signed treaties recognizing Britain as "paramount power" responsible for their military security and external relations, tribute became a functional equivalent for resources previously used to support state armies, mercenaries, or feudal levies. Imprisoned in 1831, he returned to office in 1838 (Shyamaldas 1886: 1745, 1747, 1789, 1890).

In Jodhpur, Sir Pratap Singh, the "beau ideal" of the Rajput prince in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain and a notable in London and Simla as well as at home, established an intermittent forty-year hegemony from which his natural son benefited after Sir Pratap's death. Chief adviser and regent to maharajas from 1878 until 1900, Sir Pratap was forced out in 1902 by Sir Sukhdeo Prasad, senior member of a Kashmiri Brahman lineage, who held the leading office in Jodhpur until 1910.

In the 1910–15 period, Sir Pratap returned as president of the regency council for Maharaja Sumer Singh and in 1918–22 served in the same capacity for Maharaja Umed Singh. Sir Sukhdeo left Jodhpur in 1910 to accept an appointment at Udaipur as first minister. In 1919, he returned to Jodhpur to serve under Sir Pratap in the minority government of 1918–22. In 1922, at Sir Pratap's death, he became chief member of the maharaja's council but was forced into retirement in 1924–25 by the combined efforts of Narpat Singh, Sir Pratap's natural son, and of the newly emergent states' people's freedom move-

ment under the leadership of Jai Narayan Vyas (Jodhpur and Ajmer; see also Rudolph, Rudolph, and Singh n.d.).

Another instance of relatively long-term oligopolistic competition is that between Rawal Bairi Sal Singh of Samod and Jhota Ram (Sanghi) at Jaipur. Until 1823, Bairi Sal held the official position of *mukhtiar* (first minister) in the short minority of Sawai Jai Singh even though, as David Ochterlony, the British agent for Rajputana, complained in official correspondence, Jhota Ram, who led the Jain faction at court, was *de facto mukhtiar* because he had the confidence of the regent *rani* (Batra 1958: 74). Jhota Ram was exiled in 1823 but returned in 1826. In 1828, when the Jaipur state tribute to the British fell due, the maharani successfully pressed the case for Jhota Ram to assume formal command on the ground that he alone could raise the necessary funds. Jhota Ram served as *mukhtiar* for the next seven years, until 1835 (Batra 1958: 111). In that year Bairi Sal returned as the leading state servant, now identified as Jai-Hazur Musahib, and served until his death in 1838 (Batra 1958: 131, 141), when he was succeeded by his son, Rawal Sheo Singh of Samod, who in turn served intermittently until the 1850s (Batra 1958: 144, 147–48).

These changes were neither random nor the unintended consequences of lineage ambition or maharaja's whim. The alternations of tenure in office at Udaipur and Jaipur turned not only on gaining and holding the ruler's confidence but also on the capacity to raise the requisite revenue to pay the British tribute, an effort which obliged first ministers to extract resources from powerful landed, trading, or financial families whose continued cooperation and support was at issue. The alterations also involved relations with various support bases, both local and external. Raising funds to pay the tribute might please the court and the British, but antagonize merchants and nobles from whom the funds were raised. Bairi Sal Samod had the advantage over Jhota Ram of British support while Jhota Ram in turn benefited from the support of court factions around the regent *rani*.

### MAHARAJAS' STRATEGIES

The competitive relationship of bureaucratic lineages was limited by the recognition on the part of maharajas and lineages that loyalty to the royal house and prior service created a general claim to office



(see Krisnaswamy 1977: 53). The preferred way to recognize a lineage's claim was of course to appoint its members to offices, the higher and more numerous the better. If the maharaja wished to widen his support, there were advantages to distributing offices to a larger rather than a smaller circle of families. But other considerations, such as dealing with over-mighty subjects or the need for effective administration, often led rulers to rely on the dominant figure of a particular lineage. A maharaja might find that the leader of a lineage had become too independent and wealthy in office. The cure was to remove and perhaps "tax" him while turning over charge to another lineage. If a *dewan* fell out of favor, the relatives, clients, and dependents he appointed or favored during his incumbency were likely to suffer too. When an officeholder engaged in disloyal acts or mulcted the state treasury, severe penalties, such as confiscation of property, exile, imprisonment, or death, could follow. These were not "normal" procedures, although such extreme measures were more characteristic of the first, more tumultuous, half of the nineteenth century prior to the rebellion of 1857 than they were of the more orderly second half.

There were benign ways of dealing with incumbents unable to provide the requisite quality or kind of service or who were no longer in favor. In 1881, soon after Madho Singh succeeded (by adoption) Ram Singh as maharaja of Jaipur, Thakur Fateh Singh of Naila, member of the Peelva Champawat lineage, found that he had lost his position of first minister when the post of vice-president of the maharaja's council was abolished even while he retained a seat on that largely ceremonial body (see Rudolph, Rudolph, and Singh n.d.). His rival, Babu Kanti Chander, led the government for a time from a lesser post. Eliminating the office rather than removing the man and, more generally, manipulating ceremonial and instrumental roles was more tactful and less costly politically to Maharaja Madho Singh than overtly replacing Fateh Singh with his adversary.

It was not uncommon to change the actual but not the ceremonial control of government by leaving the deposed person in a visible and dignified, but largely powerless, post while channeling state business to a person commanding the maharaja's confidence but occupying a less prestigious post. In Jaipur during the 1860s the vigorous and able Babu Hari Mohan Sen, operating from a nominally inferior post, eventually displaced as first minister Bishin Berdin, the less-able heir of an illustrious father (F. Singh 1899). Similarly, in late nineteenth-

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century Jodhpur, Sukhdeo Prasad (later Sir Sukhdeo Prasad) served as head of the first minister *Musahib Ala's* English office, through which business with the resident British representative was channeled, and came to rival his nominal superior, Sir Pratap Singh, the *Musahib Ala*, in power and influence (Acharya 1961). Sir Pratap, respected and beloved in British official circles, spoke English amusingly if indifferently but could neither read nor write it. By gaining control of this key channel of communication and action during a minority administration when British influence on princely state policy and administration was most pronounced, Sukhdeo Prasad not only rivaled his master but established a reputation that later enabled him to displace Sir Pratap as first minister.

In Jaipur, Rawal Sheo Singh of Samod was *Musahib* (nominally the senior post) from 1853 to 1858, drawing a salary of 40,000 rupees per annum, even though Pandit Sheodin, as revenue minister, had effective charge of the administration (F. Singh 1899: 180). Using severe sanctions such as outright removals followed by a purge, confiscation of wealth and property, and exile, was more costly to the maharaja than turning over actual functions to a new man while leaving the incumbent in a largely ceremonial role. The latter method resulted in a less decisive change of men and measures and returned fewer resources to the state, but was also less likely to result in turmoil, disaffection, or instability.

The change of an office from ceremonial to efficient and back again deserves more adequate treatment in the literature on bureaucracy and patrimonialism. A failure to specify the responsibilities of an office, or to adhere to them is usually treated as evidence of inadequate rationalization. Since rationalization is often taken as a code word for efficiency, vagueness concerning the ceremonial-efficient division in turn signifies patrimonial inefficiency. As the above examples suggest, there were important political reasons for vagueness, similar, for example, to those that govern who conducts U.S. foreign policy, the president's assistant for national security or the secretary of state. Vagueness provides flexibility and the benefits of redundancy or multivocality; maharajas, like presidents or prime ministers, can manipulate the ceremonial or efficient nature of offices and their responsibilities to cushion the impact or obscure the import of changes in men and measures.

Even when a family was out of favor and no longer held senior posts, the maharaja might decide to keep some members in relatively

unimportant or largely ceremonial posts in order to keep the family or lineage less disaffected. The Peelva Champawat families who served maharaja Ram Singh lost favor in 1881 soon after Madho Singh became maharaja of Jaipur and were not brought back into a central place in the Jaipur administration until 1924. Nevertheless, in the interim, several lesser family members and one senior member occupied minor or ceremonial posts in the state's administration (Rudolph, Rudolph, and Singh n.d.)

Maintaining the loyalty of a fairly broad universe of bureaucratic lineages under conditions of oligopolistic competition and conflict requires the avoidance of ruinous or humiliating removals. Maharajas or their surrogates balanced long-term against short-term political advantage. Individuals, families, and lineages who are dispensable today might be needed tomorrow.

#### OLIGOPOLY AS A RESTRAINT ON AUTOCRACY

Oligopolistic competition within a given universe of bureaucratic lineages had consequences for the nature and use of power in the princely state. First, it checked the arbitrary exercise of power (a "constitutional" function) by constraining both the ruler (the maharaja) and the leading servants of the Crown. Second, like regulated competition among parties and interest groups, it supplied rules to guide strategic behavior, bargaining, and alliance formation within princely states.

Out-of-favor bureaucratic lineages usually retained court connections as a result of their prior appointments, friends, and the conventions that governed the treatment of ousted families. Through such means they kept informed about the performance of those holding high office (the current administration). A scion of a Jodhpur *mutsaddi* (service) family, in recounting how the system worked, observed that "the rival family kept accounts of what was being given out, and of what disloyal acts might be committed" (Mehta, interview 1970). At appropriate moments, such accounts, which were often kept as written records, might be made available to the maharaja to convince him that the time had come to change his advisers.

The capacity of ousted families to maintain or gain access to state-controlled information was very considerable. In the 1840s Maharana Swaroop Singh of Udaipur found it impossible to obtain from his first

minister, Pradhan Mehta Ram Singh, a satisfactory account of the state's financial position. He called in the potential incumbent of a competing lineage, Mehta Sher Singh, for clandestine nightly visits at the palace and had him prepare a full set of the state's accounts. When Mehta Sher Singh's report confirmed the maharana's suspicions, he ordered Mehta Ram Singh's arrest on July 11, 1844. Mehta Sher Singh duly replaced Mehta Ram Singh as *pradhan* (Shyamaldas 1886: 1919). Similarly, the Champawat family at Jaipur, displaced from effective office in 1881 by Babu Kanti Chander, kept close watch on his administration. The following documents, in Hindi, are in the family archive: "Paper About Losses of the State"; "Paper Concerning Kanti Chander Not Attending Council Meetings"; "Complaints about the Clerks of the Kharkhanajat (the state industries department)"; "Complaint about the State Clerks Working at Kanti Chander's House"; "Complaint of Shirpal of Ajmer"; "Paper Concerning Application of the Cultivators"; "List of Bribes Taken by Hathi Babu, Son of Kanti Chander Mukerjee"; "List of the Gifts given by the Jaipur State to Thakur Jeevraj Singh of Peelva, Thakur Fateh Singh of Naila, and the Increments of Babu Kanti Chander"; and many more (M. Singh n.d.).

Maharajas who did not take pains to scrutinize closely the conduct of their ministers or lacked the technical skill to do so could overcome their difficulties as dilettantes by turning to competing service families. They helped to liberate rulers from the consequences of bureaucratic control of information and expertise. Oligopolistic competition provided a means to hold princely state administrators accountable and made available qualified alternative governments when maharajas required them. In a context where formal sovereignty lay with the maharaja rather than with an aristocracy or the people, oligopolistic competition and alternation among bureaucratic lineages contributed to restraints on the arbitrary exercise of power.

A maharaja who sought to free himself from the forces and personalities that centered on his principal minister was apt to choose someone from an ousted bureaucratic lineage to become his personal adviser and/or first minister. This situation was common to maharajas who had just succeeded to the *gaddi*. For a time, the maharaja could expect such new first ministers to depend on his favor and support. Thus Maharaja Madho Singh of Jaipur, at his accession to the throne in 1881, freed himself of the Peelva Champawat connection, three of

whose members had been his predecessor's principal ministers. Ironically, as we noted above, the Peelva Champawats, in the expectation that gratitude would result in their continuation in office had promoted Madho Singh's adoption in the face of the stronger claims of an alternative cadet branch (Rudolph, Rudolph, and Singh n.d.; Paliwal 1971).

## BUREAUCRATIC LINEAGES AS POLITICAL ACTORS

Bureaucratic lineages played a significant role in the struggle for power and the choice of policy in nineteenth-century princely states. They were part of a political universe that included the maharaja; his heir, who, like the future George III, often played a "Prince of Wales" role by providing a center for opposition and dissent; the *mahji*, or *baiji*, mother of the maharaja, whose influence was greatest when the maharaja was a minor (Batra 1958: 57ff); the British resident who spoke for the paramount power and, as the century progressed, displaced the *mahji* as the principal influence during minorities;<sup>8</sup> the *jagirdars* (landed aristocracy) whose ceremonial recognition by the state as an established status order and bearers of public authority in their estates was expressed in their presence and rank in the *darbar* (court); those powerful individual *jagirdars* who were great magnates, such as Pokran, Asop, and Ahwa in Jodhpur, Salumber in Udaipur, and Chomu, Samod, Sikar, and Khetri in Jaipur; *jagirdar* connections or factions, such as the *panchpana sardars* of Shekhawati and the Nathawat (Samod-Chomu) connection at Jaipur who sometimes allied with a potential heir apparent (Jhalai); the bureaucratic lineages in and out of power, whether from within (*mutsaddi*, Rajput, Muslim, Charan, etc.) or from without (Kashmiri, Bengali, Muslim, etc.); and the merchants, financiers, and traders of the capital or other commercial entrepôts who were a major source of state wealth and revenue and often spokesmen for competitive religious communities, for example, Jains, Vaisnavites, Shivites.<sup>9</sup>

Bureaucratic lineages maneuvered in the field of force set up by these actors and their interests. Ministers sought to maintain royal favor and to make and broaden alliances with other incumbent lineages by bargaining over patronage, benefits, and policy. Aspiring ministers tried to create counteralliances and, perhaps, to articulate different goals. The dominant alliances in Jaipur from the 1820s to the 1850s,

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for example, were organized around *mahjis*, mothers of the minor maharajas Sawai Jai Singh and Ram Singh, and involved the Nathawat (a subclan of Kachhwahas) connection at whose center stood Rawal Bairi Sal of Samod and his cousin, Thakur Kishan Singh of Chomu, and a counteralliance focused on the Jain minister, Jhota Ram. The British tended to favor Samod (Batra 1958: 57ff). In short, bureaucratic lineages and their patrons and allies were among the most important political actors in the political community of Rajput princely states.

### ELITE RECRUITMENT

Recruitment to positions in the political bureaucracy in the nineteenth-century states of Rajputana was circumscribed by community and within community by recognized and established lineages. The supply of senior Crown servants was more indigenous in Udaipur and Jodhpur than it was in Jaipur, where Maharaja Ram Singh (1835–80) revitalized Jaipur's more cosmopolitan legacy by recruiting outsiders, especially from Bengal and from among U.P. Muslims. Even in Udaipur and Jodhpur, however, the sources from which state servants were recruited changed over time as a result of appointments from outside prescriptive boundaries.

Three social categories contributed the bulk of senior Crown appointments in the nineteenth century. First were the indigenous "feudal" class composed of *jagirdars*. *Jagirdars* were titled holders of landed estates bearing feudal-like obligations with respect to security, order, and justice. They usually belonged to the same social order-cum-community (Rajput) and clan (Rathore, Sisodia, and Kachhwaha) as the maharajas of Jodhpur, Udaipur, and Jaipur. Second were indigenous trader, bard, priest, and scribe communities with traditions of literacy and service (Oswals and Maheshwaris, Charans, Muslims, Brahmans, and Kayasthas).<sup>10</sup> Third were outside or "foreign" recruits drawn from like social categories in neighboring princely states or from anglicized representatives of literate communities in British India, for example, Bengalis and Kashmiris or Englishmen. Elite recruitment from the first two categories served to integrate state and society by giving representatives of Rajputana's dominant status orders an honored and profitable place in the state. Recruitment from the third category signals efforts to enhance state autonomy and centralization and to adapt to changes in the larger subcontinental environment. Maharajas

bent on strengthening their positions vis-à-vis status orders and elites sought “free men” in the form of outsiders not beholden to local interests nor dependent on and accountable to them. The choice of outsiders also reflected an effort to recruit state servants educated in the English medium and socialized in the perspective and manners of India’s British rulers.

Notable among the Rajput *jagirdars* serving the *darbar* (court) were the *dewans* provided by the Samod and Chomu estates in Jaipur. They were Nathawats, a subclan of Kachhwahas, the clan of the Jaipur dynasty’s rulers. In Udaipur, the Chauhan lineages of the Bedla and Kotharia estates provided a succession of senior administrators. These *jagirs* were established in the sixteenth century soon after the battle of Khanwah (1527) when a Rajput alliance led by Rana Sanga of Udaipur was defeated by Babur (founder of the Mughal dynasty) and many of the leading Chauhan Rajputs of what is now western U.P. retreated with him to Udaipur.

Rajput *jagirdars* such as Samod, Chomu, and Bedla served the court even though they belonged to a status order whose interests often conflicted with it. Like European kings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, maharajas in Rajputana often favored royal servants from communities who did not share control of the land and military force and who could not constrain them with the obligations and commitments that clan, lineage, and marriage imposed. Nevertheless, home Rajput Crown servants were often attractive because, in the absence of effective state forces, they commanded military skills and resources and because they could, on occasion, subdue rebellious *jagirdars* who had become overmighty subjects.<sup>11</sup> *Jagirdars* like Bedla and Kotharia in Udaipur (from “foreign” clans) were used as counterweights against the large home clan estates (Erskine 1908). But Rajput state servants were also a danger; the lines between protector of the king, kingmaker, and king usurper were fluid. The Rajputs’ military calling remained of some moment through much of the nineteenth century in part because rebellious Rajput *jagirdars*, *dacoits* (marauding robbers, often dispossessed or alienated Rajputs), and rebellious tribal communities continued to pose serious problems for local and, occasionally, statewide order and security.

The Rajputs who served the ruler were gradually transformed from feudal courtiers and household retainers to patrimonial bureaucrats. Because the local authority, resources, and martial skills of the Rajput

nobles remained important well into the twentieth century for the legitimacy and internal security of the state, they retained a credible, though declining, claim to efficient as well as ceremonial state offices. Service as a salaried official was an anomaly for Rajput noblemen and *jagirdars*. *Jagir* grants were renewed by the maharaja at *Matmi* ceremonies after the death of an incumbent. The heir and successor pledged his loyalty and service (and often paid a substantial sum of money) in return for confirmation of his estate and title by the maharaja. Under the “feudal” conception of the *jagir* grant, a thakur (lord) who served or advised the maharaja did so freely in a double sense, voluntarily and without pay, as a peer rather than a paid employee.<sup>12</sup> *Jagirs* in Rajputana, unlike those granted by the Mughals, were not given a salary and were not generally revocable (although some maharajas tried to treat them as revocable) (see Habib 1963). The challenges mounted to the Jodhpur throne by Pokran and to the Udaipur rana by Salumber, and the resistance of Sikar in Jaipur suggest how equal (and problematic) such relations could be (see Rubin n.d.). Yet, even while the “feudal” relation between maharajas and *jagirdars* persisted into the twentieth century, the standing of Rajput ministers was transformed in the course of the nineteenth century from independent landed magnates with local powers who might also on occasion serve the *darbar* into salaried officials of a ruler.

British influence seems to have played a part in this development. During minorities, British agents and residents favored regency councils composed of *jagirdars* not unsympathetic to British influence and policies. Regency councils were frequent in Udaipur before the long reign of Fateh Singh (1884–1921) and in Jodhpur after the death of Maharaja Jaswant Singh in 1895 when Sir Pratap Singh, Jaswant Singh’s brother, served on three occasions (1895–98; 1911–16; 1918–22) as head of regency councils. The British officers in Jodhpur who served as president or members of these councils were salaried, and this practice affected the Rajput members as well. In Jaipur during the extended minority of Ram Singh (1835–51), salaried Rajput service became an acceptable rule of conduct. With the British agent Major Ross as president, the council included Rawal Sheo Singh of Samod, the *Hazur Musahib* (first minister) at 20,000 rupees per annum; his brother, the Thakur of Chomu, the *Fauj Musahib* (defense minister) at 10,000 rupees per annum; and, as members, Thakur Bhopal Singh of Jhalai, a presumptive heir to the throne via adoption, at 18,000



rupees per annum; Thakur Sur Singh, at 7,000 rupees per annum; and Thakur Sumer Singh (Sheo Singh [Samod] drew 40,000 rupees in the 1850s [F. Singh 1899: 180]). These changes occurred at the same time as state resources were changing from a usufruct due to the ruler and his clansmen to public revenues allocated in a state budget.

Transformation of state-society relations in nineteenth-century Rajputana from decentralized "feudal" to more centralized monarchical norms and practices was more akin to English than to continental development (see Goodwin 1967). As in England, differences were expressed in conflicting "court" and "country" ideological orientations. While there was no predictable way to tell which view a Rajput might hold, those whose interests and experiences were rooted in court service tended to be adherents of a court perspective while those who identified with the rights and life-styles of the "manor" tended to hold country views. We have learned from Amar Singh's diary that Amar Singh's guardian and patron, Sir Pratap Singh, prince-regent of Jodhpur and maharaja of Idar, and Narain Singh of Kanota, the diarist's father, who was companion to the young Ram Singh of Jaipur and a senior official in Jaipur and Alwar states, were advocates and practitioners of court doctrines while the young Amar Singh, an eldest son who expected to (and did) inherit his father's estate and title, frequently contrasted his own country perspective with those of his patron and father.<sup>13</sup> Court measures included rationalizing land revenue administration by introducing periodic assessments and cash payments, regulating or appropriating the duties and excises collected by *jagirs*, taking control of mineral, distillery, and forest rights and revenues, investing in capital development (railroads, irrigation), and so on. In the twentieth century, Maharaja Ganga Singh at Bikaner and Maharaja Man Singh at Jaipur centralized power through such means, by intervening in *jagir* family affairs such as inheritance, marriage, and education and, in Bikaner, seizing *jagirs* and exiling their masters.

Leading examples of the second category, "home," traditionally literate communities, are the Mehta and Singhvi lineages at Jodhpur and Udaipur. Many merchant communities in west India (Gujarat, Rajasthan, Kathiawad) pursued not only trade but service at courts or large *jagirs*. Mehtas and Singhvis are Oswals, an endogamous caste community. Oswals in service identified themselves as *Mutsaddis* and distinguished themselves from Oswals in trade and finance. *Mutsaddis* attempted to maintain marriage patterns that separated them from

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merchant Oswals (L. M. Singhvi, interview 1970; G. S. Mehta, interview 1971). The distinction was not easily maintained, however, because merchant families who arranged for or provided credit to maharajas and *jagirdars* often became involved in revenue administration in the course of ensuring repayment. Major Impey, resident at Jodhpur, reported an overlap between the financial and political interests of the *Mutsaddis*, although perhaps with a jaundiced eye: "All the *Mutsaddis* are bankers and traders; they have money transactions with the *Thakurs* and people all over the country. . . . It will constantly be related that a certain *Mutsaddi* has the '*booghut*' (is the banker) of a certain *Thakur*; that he is secretly intriguing for that *Thakur* against the interest of the *Durbar* (Maharaja) . . ." (India 1871[?]: 118). Prominent Charan (caste of bards) *dewans* or senior court servants included Kaviraj (court poet) Shyamaldas at Udaipur and Kaviraj Murardan at Jodhpur.<sup>14</sup> An outstanding example of a "home" Muslim is Fayeze Ulla Khan, grandfather of Rajasthan's chief minister in the early 1970s, Barkatulla Khan. Fayeze Ulla Khan served as *dewan* of Jodhpur in the late nineteenth century.

Unlike service in European absolutist states or under the Mughal empire, which opened the way to becoming a member of the titled and/or landed aristocracy, state service for non-Rajputs, home or foreign, did not do so. Oswals, Charans, Brahmins, Muslims, and Kayasths might, as a result of state service, be given *jagirs* and court honors, but cultural segmentation and caste endogamy barred their assimilation by achievement and marriage into the Rajput status and ruling order. By contrast, humble Rajputs without patrimony and regardless of clan or state affiliation could marry Rajputs of the highest rank and acquire titles and estates by inheritance (including adoption) or service. In this sense there was a marked asymmetry in the elite composed of bureaucratic lineages.

The third category, "foreign" or exogenous recruits, included Bengalis in Jaipur such as the Mukherji and Sen families; Kashmiri Brahmins such as the Atal family in Jaipur and the family of Sir Sukhdeo Prasad in Jodhpur; and Muslims, such as Faiz Ali Khan and his son Fayaz Ali Khan at Jaipur. They were the forerunners of princely state administrators such as K. M. Pannikar, Sir V. T. Krishnamachari, Sir Mirza Ismail, and assorted Englishmen (mostly from the Political Service) who served at the highest levels in a variety of states. The foreigner was attractive to rulers not only because he commanded the

language, skills, and manners useful under British hegemony but also because from the outset he was not embedded in local society. Outsiders could more easily be maharajas' men than could "home" recruits who, when in service, also represented fixed and particular interests in the home society.

In Jaipur, which recruited more "foreign" state servants than did the other states, the chief administrative post of *dewan* passed from "home" state servants in the 1850s, when Samod dominance ended. Pandit Sheodin, effectively in charge in the 1850s, was a Brahman from Rewah, now in Madhya Pradesh, apparently brought to Jaipur as a tutor for the minor maharaja. (See *India 1867*: 164–65 for an account of the rise of Pandit Sheodin.) Faiz Ali Khan, a large landholder in Uttar Pradesh and a leading figure in the loyal, modernizing Muslim cultural revival led by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan from the Muslim Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh (Lelyveld 1978), also headed the administration in the 1850s while his son, Fayaz Ali Khan, did so after the turn of the century (Ajmer 1903). Babu Hari Mohan Sen, active in the 1860s, was a Bengali and like the other "foreign" state servants at Jaipur had come in as a schoolmaster; Thakur Fateh Singh of Naila, *dewan* in the 1870s, was a Champawat (Rathore clan) Rajput from Jodhpur; Babu Kanti Chander Mukherjee, in charge of Jaipur state administration from 1880 until 1901, was a Bengali; so too was Babu Sanser Chander Sen, *dewan* in the first decade of the twentieth century.

Jaipur practice was a more pronounced version of a general trend, and for good reason. During the course of the nineteenth century, the relative balance among the three categories shifted in favor of foreign recruits as dependence on British power for external security, and ultimately for internal order, made maharajas less dependent for support and legitimacy on internal forces and political actors. British troops were stationed at Nazirabad, near Ajmer, at the center of Rajputana. Later, in the 1880s, the organization of imperial service military units in the larger states diminished the importance of *dewans* and civilian military commanders (*Fauj Musahib*) drawn from the warrior-ruler caste of Rajputs. As maharajas came to rely for state security on state forces directly under their own command and on British forces, the importance of Rajput skills, resources, and loyal support for state administration dwindled.

In the 1920s, with the rise of states' people's freedom movements in the princely states, "foreign" administrators provided targets for

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grievances and demands. Why, it was asked, were outsiders preferred over local residents familiar with local conditions, problems, and aspirations? The charge was leveled not only against English officials in the employ of princely states, who were doubly suspect because of their connections to the British *raj*, but also against Indians not native to particular princely states. In this sense, the demand for “representative” government in princely India was like the demand in British India for Indianization of the Indian Civil Service before Indians were represented in legislatures and executive councils (see Coupland 1944). It was a somewhat macabre coalition between Narpat Singh, natural son of the former regent, Sir Pratap Singh, and an influential member of the Jodhpur maharaja’s court, and Jai Narayan Vyas, the Brahman journalist who led the freedom movement in that state (and later became chief minister of Rajasthan), that in 1926 forced out Sir Sukhdeo Prasad, the Kashmiri Brahman who had held leading posts in Jodhpur since the turn of the century, from his post as first minister. The event suggests how in the struggle for power patrimonial and democratic forces can, as Weber recognized, ally to attack impersonal bureaucratic standards for qualification and legitimacy.

### QUALIFICATION: BIRTH, LOYALTY, TALENT, AND POLITICAL SUPPORT

Qualification for office was as much corporate as individual. Bureaucratic lineages and the rulers who appointed them understood that service was collective as well as interdependent. If one member of a lineage was in disfavor, a shadow was cast on the rest. The corporate aspect of state service is illustrated by the fact that offices were sometimes filled by as yet untrained minors of favored lineages and families. Thus Narendra Nath Guntu at Jodhpur became *hakim* (head of a *parganah*) at seven and Zalim Singh, later *dewan* of Kotah and later still maharaja of the newly created state of Jhalawar, assumed his first responsible position at Kotah at fourteen. It was understood that the family, including its retainers and household servants, would administer the office for the junior member as he learned on the job. Corporate qualification was not only or merely the product of a biopolitical belief. It had an empirical basis in family history, culture, and socialization. The lineage was the repository of relevant knowledge and skills which were transmitted and cultivated via intergenerational edu-

cation and training by family retainers who were themselves hereditary specialists.

Individual achievement was also significant. Hailing from a prominent lineage of the right community was often a necessary condition for princely state service in nineteenth-century Rajputana but was not by itself enough. Birth in certain families gave a distinct added advantage, even a special claim, to appointment in senior posts. But birth created an opportunity, not a guarantee, that senior posts would be accessible. When Pandit Sheodin, who governed Jaipur in the 1850s, died, his son, Bishen Berdin, was appointed in his place. Bishen Berdin proved ineffectual and desultory in carrying out his responsibilities; hence the secretary to the maharaja's council, Babu Hari Mohan Sen, "took the government into his hands, he being the most active of the members" (F. Singh 1899: 189). Several decades later, prime minister Babu Kanti Chander Mukherjee's more easygoing son "Hathi" Babu was unable to capitalize on the legacy of his father's attainments and advantages at the level of first minister, though he served as a minister (A. C. Mukherjee, grandson of Babu Kanti Chander, interview 1970). In Udaipur in the early 1930s, Dharam Narain, Sir Sukhdeo Prasad's less able son, could not hold for long the *dewanship* that his father occupied after leaving Jodhpur in 1926. By contrast, *dewans* Mehta Sher Singh in the first half of the nineteenth century and Mehta Pannelal at the end took advantage of the political capital laid up by earlier generations of their families in Udaipur (see India 1876: 18; Shyamaldas 1886: 2121, 2141).

Qualification by birth rested less on faith in a blood line than on implicit social considerations. Birth was valued in part because it guaranteed embeddedness in the rules and obligations of historical traditions and in the social and political relationships of a given state. More important, birth signaled loyalty over time and generations to the ruling family. As permanent clients, not temporary hirelings, the long-term ideal and material interests of bureaucratic lineages were closely intertwined with those of the ruling dynasty. A descendant of a Jodhpur *dewan* observed that "there has been an idea here that loyalty comes by blood" and that "those who have been supported will give support" (Govind Singh Mehta, interview). Those who have sought to explain the anomaly of the hereditary and voluntary features of the feudal bond between lord and vassal sometimes compare it to the marriage bond. Like the feudal contract, the marriage contract creates

a primary bond by voluntary agreement. The service relationship in the princely states between maharajas and service families seems to have involved a similar mutation. An example from an earlier century may throw some light on this matter: the wife of Maharana Hamir Singh of Udaipur, daughter of Rao Maldeo of Songara, advised her husband that he might regain Chittor, his kingdom's principal fort and capital, if he took into his service her father's *kamdar* (estate agent; chief *jagir* official), Mehta Mauji Ram. The maharana agreed. Rao Maldeo came with his *kamdar* to the court, where the following ceremony was performed. Rao Maldeo placed Mehta Mauji Ram's hand on that of his new master, the maharana, and said that from today this is your servant. The maharana replied that he henceforth considered himself dependent on Mauji Ram and would take his advice (Shyamaldas 1886: 295–96).

What is being transferred and pledged, with the consent of all parties, is loyalty, the loyalty of the *kamdar*, Mehta Mauji Ram, from his old master, Rao Maldeo to his new master, Maharana Hamir Singh, in return for the maharana's pledge to accept and use his advice.

Loyalty is a living thing; it requires signs and proofs, redefinitions and renewals. Bureaucratic lineages could and did fall out of favor and lose office. They had to renew their reputations for loyalty (and effectiveness) in each generation and with each new ruler by proving themselves in action. To maintain and use the opportunities of family meant a constant search for the meaning and realization of loyalty in the context of family and dynastic interest.

Capacity or talent in the form of effective application of certain knowledge and skills was required to make good the opportunity birth and renewed loyalty provided. In this respect, qualification in the princely states had to be continually proven anew. Lack of capacity does not necessarily or severely penalize the twentieth-century career civil servant; he will not lose his job, retirement benefits, or even promotions if his performance is mediocre to poor or even if he is involved in minor irregularities. The rewards and immunities provided by seniority in a career service constitute a kind of appropriation of office. Seniority creates a routine and legitimate means to capture resources, status, and power.<sup>15</sup> Princely state servants, by contrast, served at the pleasure of the ruler and thus continually had to prove themselves.

Pleasing the maharaja or, in times of minorities, the *mahji* (queen

mother) and, later in the century, the British resident, required expressive as well as instrumental capabilities. Charm, wit, and the appropriate manner, whose standards varied with cultural context, could count for a great deal. The Amar Singh diary (1898–1942) for the turn of the century depicts at the center of Jodhpur court life the young maharaja's companions at the table or hunt, his teachers, those with whom he played polo, and sometimes his companions in debauchery. The durable Peelva Champawat (Rathore) bureaucratic lineage in Jaipur rose to prominence through a chance encounter. Jeevraj Singh, on a visit to Jaipur, rode a camel with such panache that he attracted the attention of young Maharaja Ram Singh who resolved to meet and learn from him (see Rudolph, Rudolph, and Singh 1975).

Military, financial, and administrative knowledge and skills were important components of talent. Valor, skill in arms, and leadership were at the center of the *kshatriya* calling of the Rajput *jagirdars*. But as military leadership and skill became less significant in the course of the nineteenth century, maharajas turned increasingly to others to provide the requisite talent.

Financial skills too were essential to the court and the state. Badwa Amar Chand was made *dewan* at Udaipur in 1769–70 because it was though he could raise the funds needed to pay Sindhi mercenaries engaged to fight the Marathas (Shyamaldas 1886: 1558–59). Som Chand Gandhi was given service there after the previous *pradhan* had failed to provide funds to meet the expenses of the *baiji raj* (queen mother) and her son, the minor maharana (Shyamaldas 1886: 1706). Mehta Ram Chand served several times as chief minister of Udaipur in the first half of the nineteenth century in part because he seemed to be specially qualified to find the means to pay the British tribute.

From the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, capacity and talent came increasingly to be defined in terms of the knowledge and skills that were influential and effective with the new paramount power. By the end of the century, English had replaced Persian, the court language of the previous rulers, the Mughals, and was replacing Urdu as the administrative language. The “foreigners” at Jodhpur and Jaipur—the Sukhdeo Prasad family at Jodhpur and the Sen and Mukherji families at Jaipur—came initially as schoolmasters and tutors of the English medium, a skill which they used to build service careers for themselves and their children.

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Independent of birth but frequently allied with it was political support. To serve at the highest levels required the political skill and leadership to please the ruler, keep and hold the support of key elites, and represent dominant interests. One perceptive British resident recognized this representative role. Pleading in 1869 for the appointment of Mehta Bijey Singh at Jodhpur, who commanded the confidence of the court personnel and the thakurs, Colonel J. C. Brooke wrote:

“The most influential and the most popular individual for the post was undoubtedly Bijey Singh . . . as he was on friendly terms with the principal thakurs . . . (and) the most respectable people about [the maharaja] . . . those of highest rank in the zenana were anxious for [his] appointment. . . . A minister was required who should be known to and trusted by the country. . . .” Brooke saw the possibility that outside ministers, appointed by the maharaja to strengthen himself, would be viewed as interlopers. When Jodhpur *dewan* Murdan Ali Khan found his commands upset by other servants of the state, he “sent for a number of Mussalman from the North-West Provinces with a view to swamp the Native Officials of the country. . . . At no time has a foreigner much chance of success in Marwar, where the language itself differs from that of the rest of India . . . [and] there was no chance of the Marwar officers pulling with an outsider” (India 1870[?]: 107–9).

All these remarks suggest that the virtue of a “home” *dewan* was not only his representative quality but also his propensity to distribute patronage to locals.

## EDUCATION AND SOCIALIZATION

The education and socialization of bureaucratic lineages can be distinguished from the “professional” training that characterizes modern bureaucracies in institutional or process terms but not in functional terms. What we know about the education and socialization of children in service families is mainly derived from interviews with persons who served in the princely states and with their descendants. It was not carried on in differentiated and specialized institutions, even though specialists took an active part in training the young. Even so ultimately illustrious a figure as Sir Pratap Singh, who, as his brother Maharaja Jaswant Singh’s (1873–95) *dewan*, ended chaotic conditions in Jodhpur



by major reforms, did so only after five years of training (1873–78) at the court of his progressive, reform-minded brother-in-law, Maharaja Ram Singh of Jaipur (Ratnu 1902; Radhakrishna 1939).

The family was the key institution for shaping character, outlook, and skills; specialists worked at the behest of the family and within its ambit. In the first instance, education and socialization dealt with cultural and political orientation and knowledge. Skills in warfare, accounts, administration, and languages also were central. Skills, like cultural orientation and political knowledge, were transmitted in considerable measure by specialist family retainers.

Children learned a great deal of what they knew about the family's history and traditions from Baraths or Charans, family bards, teachers, and archivists who might visit an Oswal or Mahajan family's branches at Jodhpur, Kishengarh, and Udaipur to recite and teach *dohas*, the couplets which served as single aphorisms or as the units of a longer poem. They might have written some themselves. They provided a world view through the historical account of the state's dynasty and the family's community and lineage. In the seventeenth century Charans wrote history or provided the materials for written histories, as the work of Nainsi at Jodhpur makes clear (Sakari 1960–67; Ziegler n.d.). Charans wrote "committed" history, celebrating codes of conduct and theories about the nature of the social world even while examining critically the causes and consequences of failures. The accounts might portray how grandfather Mehta Ram Singh had negotiated the terms of the British alliance with Colonel Tod at Udaipur. Such education was meant to convey not only a proper sense for the family's standing in the history of Udaipur and Rajputana but also a sense for the lessons learned and techniques used. "From very birth a man had to be properly placed," a *muttsaddi* descendant observed of his own experience. "Every child would be taught the genealogy for seven generations, and the accompanying history. They learned to give oblations to their ancestors. The first job of the steward of a family was to bring the child into the history of the family" (these and following quotes from Govind Singh Mehta).

Two sorts of themes were stressed in family histories: what the family had done, its successes and failures being used as practical lessons in politics, administration, and finance; and what the family's relation to other families, including the maharaja's family, had been. What the family had been able to do, it had done in conjunction with others

located outside the boundaries of the lineage and the community as well as inside them. "A man was not born alone; he had the support of many others." Children were taught from whom the family had expected and received support, and from whom it had not. The children also learned, in relation to the maharaja's predecessors and family members and other key families, "when relations were 'thick' and when they were 'thin'"; "we found out the discreditable side of other families, and they of course in turn were told the weaknesses of my family." They were oriented also to their place in the political and social order: "From the day I was born, there were persons to salute one. There were persons whom I saluted."

Technical skills required for the performance of official duties beyond those of language, warfare, and accounts were gradually supplied over time by apprenticeship training. But certain kinds of more routine and detailed skills were not generally available to the children of bureaucratic lineages, who could expect to hold office near the apex of power and responsibility. A good *pradhan*, councillor, or minister would have to know such things as what level of revenue demand might legitimately be made and on whom, when and what proportion of the revenue was ordinarily allocated to the various departments of government. Scions of bureaucratic lineages generally relied on more junior ranks and lower-level clerks for the skills, knowledge, and routines of day-to-day administration. There are reports of wholesale shifts in clerical staffs with the change of *dewan*.<sup>16</sup>

Mohan Singh Mehta, scion of a long line of Udaipur state servants, a senior official there himself, former Indian ambassador to Switzerland and vice-chancellor of the University of Rajasthan, whose son, Jagat Mehta, served as India's external affairs secretary, characterized the education received by the sons of bureaucratic lineages as similar to the generalist training of England's and India's intelligent and cultivated amateur, the well-rounded man of good mind and character.<sup>17</sup> The sons of princely state bureaucratic lineages had the appropriate social and cultural background and understanding, were deeply embedded in the social and political elites of their time and place, learned on the job, used their experience, intelligence, and good judgment in recommending policy, and relied on the lower ranks for the skills and routines needed for implementation. What was different was the relative priority given to loyalty over rules and the authority of persons over the authority of office.

## NOTES

1. We are indebted to grants from the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Raymond W. and Martha Hilpert Gruner Social Sciences Endowment which have made possible the travel and time for this article.

2. We are aware that conventional usage arising from Max Weber's interpretation of bureaucracy would oppose rather than unite the terms *bureaucratic* and *lineage*. Our investigations of administration in India and the United States have led us to be increasingly dissatisfied with Weber's ideal typical distinction between modern bureaucratic and traditional patrimonial. For a reasoned elaboration of these views and their implications see Rudolph and Rudolph 1979.

3. Other papers in this volume (e.g., Greenhouse) treat eliteness in subjective terms. The elite knows itself by reference to ideas that are not known or accepted by the societies in which they live. Born-again Baptists in urban, commercial Georgia know Christ and live in his kingdom. Eliteness requires some kind of recognition, for example, from God or a self-chosen community. Like Wittgenstein with respect to a private language, we find the notion of "private" eliteness inaccessible and contradictory.

4. The areas became a state of independent India known as Rajasthan.

5. The literature on Rajasthan is substantial. Among accounts relevant for understanding the structure of politics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see especially: Crooke 1920; Bannerjee 1944; Tod 1950; Coulborn 1956; Qanungo 1960; Ziegler 1973. For a discussion of the feudalism debate, see S. Rudolph 1963.

6. Robin Jeffrey and Rajat K. Ray note that there were also relatively autonomous indigenous sources of change (Jeffrey 1979). Upinder Kishen Zutshi, who summarizes much of the literature on the princely state of Kashmir, also shows certain indigenous sources of change even while stressing imperial policy as the principal source. See Zutshi 1980.

7. Weber captures the conceptual and historical differences in his term *patrimonial bureaucracy*. See Roth and Wittich 1968. For other accounts of the shift from household servants and personal retainers to state functionaries see Tout 1952: 79; Chrimes 1959; Aylmer 1961. T. F. Tout makes a very strong case for the early emergence in England of rationalized state activities on the part of nominal household servants and personal retainers. What he says of medieval record keeping, that it "leaves nothing to be desired in completeness and precision," is equally true of the court and *thikana* records in Rajasthan we have so far examined.

8. For an account of the personalities and measures of the minority administration of Maharaja Man Singh II of Jaipur that illustrates how British officials displaced court influence, see Jaipur 1935: Chapter 4. For a minority

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administration that was partially confounded by a powerful minor, Maharaja Ganga Singh of Bikaner, see Panikkar 1937.

9. See Surindra Gopal's account of the merchant trade through Rajasthan which gave rise to and sustained the substantial trading castes of Rajasthan (1975: Chapter 3). For an account of how Rajputana's leading merchant community, the Marwaris, became India's foremost industrial and commercial capitalists, see Timberg 1978. Muslim first ministers who served Jaipur state periodically from the 1860s through Sir Mirza Ismail in 1942 (see Ismail 1954: Chapter 8) did not play the same representative role as Hindu and Jain first ministers because they were outsiders. In Jodhpur the indigenous bureaucratic lineage from which the late chief minister of Rajasthan, Barkatullah Khan, was descended, did play a comparable representative role.

10. The Oswal and Maheshwari *jatis* (castes) were usually merchants in Rajputana, considered of the *vaishya* varna; Charans were court poets and historians, "bards"; Kayasthas were the caste of scribes that emerged in north India, often as record keepers to the Moghul courts and administration.

11. This was not merely a presumption. Sir Pratap Singh at Jodhpur in the 1880s was effective in the suppression of obstreperous nobles (van Wart 1926); Narain Singh Kanota, father of the diarist Amar Singh, evidently based his effectiveness as Nazim of Jhunjhunu on his reputation as a formidable fighting man as well as his capacity as a skillful political negotiator. The Rawal of Samod as *dewan* at Jaipur in the 1830s personally commanded contingents in Jaipur city conflicts (Batra 1958: 147–48). At Jodhpur the Thakurs of Ahwa and Pokran were a frequent threat to the maharaja, as they were at Udaipur Salumber and at Jaipur Sikar as late as 1937.

12. The Rao Raja of Bedla served Udaipur throughout the nineteenth century as a member of council; only in the 1930s, however, did his post begin to carry a salary. (Interview with Rao Raja Manohar Singh of Bedla 1970.)

13. In the *Youth of a Rajput Nobleman*, the diarist records his respectful disapprobation of the views of his father Narain Singh. He perceives Sir Pratap Singh, regent of Jodhpur, as holding a court perspective and criticizes him accordingly.

14. Murardan was also caste head of the Charans for Jodhpur; he appeared at a number of weddings in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to receive the traditional donations given to Charans at weddings.

Kaviraj Shyamaldas (1836–90 or 1893), a Charan, became the *dewan* at Udaipur under Maharana Sajjan Singh (1874–84). He may have been sanctioned 100,000 rupees to prepare a history of Rajputana. A history department was established in the Mewar (Udaipur) government by Maharana Shambu Singh (died 1874). Fateh Singh, who succeeded Sajjan Singh in 1884, permitted the publication of Shyamaldas' *Vir Vinod* (4 volumes) around 1886 but then refused to allow the volumes to be made available to the public.

15. For the various forms of appropriation available to career civil servants

serving in modern bureaucracies see Rudolph and Rudolph 1979. We are indebted to Mohan Mukerjee, formerly Chief Secretary, Government of Rajasthan, for calling our attention to this comparison.

16. Murdan Ali Khan at Jodhpur had brought in U. P. Muslims to populate the clerical ranks (see India 1870[?]: 107–9) and Pandit Sheodin at Jaipur was reported to have favored heavily his own relations. See India 1867: 164–65.

17. Interviews with Mohan Singh Mehta, formerly first minister of Banswara, minister at Udaipur, and descendant of the Mehta Ram Singh family at Udaipur.

10

# The Fiduciary Role in American Family Dynasties and Their Institutional Legacy

From the Law of Trusts  
to Trust in the Establishment

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This paper has two main purposes. First, it extends work in progress on the viability and importance of dynastic families as elite formations in American (and especially Texan) society over the past century. My argument is that families, tied to fortunes that they do not fully control, become complex, if not corporate, organizations of interdependent components. These complex “wholes” are, in turn, dependent for their solidity and perpetuation on appropriate experts and legal artifice. Second, this paper suggests a speculative argument which links the evolution of the fiduciary position in families of property to a very similar ideological position of upper-class institutions in American society generally.

In my research during the past six years, I have turned from an interest in old and new elite family organization in the Kingdom of Tonga to a not unrelated study of the achievement, in the face of considerable obstacles, of descent group organization among American families of great wealth. I have seen how profoundly the use of legal instruments has been implicated in this achievement, and more important, how critical has been the work of professional administrators, who, as guard-

ians of fortunes, also become instrumental in holding together family organizations, almost in spite of family members themselves. The gray, rational world of the professional administrator of trusts and estates may seem an unlikely subject for social anthropology, which, in studying kin groups, is accustomed to focusing on relations among kin members themselves. Yet, in capitalist societies, all organizations that exhibit corporate qualities<sup>1</sup> are rationalized<sup>2</sup> by the practice of appropriate experts. Thus, the focus of solidarity within an upper-class family shifts as it ages generationally from relations among its members to the caretaking of the transcendent version of itself, constructed through resources of law and overseen by professional fiduciaries.

A fiduciary is simply anyone who acts for and in the interest of another, with the implication that the relationship is one of trust and dependence by the less able latter toward the competent former. Under the law, a fiduciary is most conventionally a trustee, who, within the framework of a trust instrument, is bound to hold and manage property in the interests of designated beneficiaries. However, in this paper, it will be necessary to view this basic, legal fiduciary function in a much broader way. My discussion covers situations where a family's trusts are managed by corporate fiduciary bodies, such as bank trust departments, but the family still has within it a key adviser (or advisory group) who takes on generalized fiduciary functions that are similar to, but not framed by, the legal regulation of a trust instrument. I have called these more intimate, but nonetheless professional, fiduciaries inside-outsiders (see Marcus 1980).

This paper will examine the role of fiduciaries in the perpetuation of both fortunes and families as corporate organizations in American society. After exploring a set of topics concerning the historic legal evolution of fiduciaries and their structural position in dynastic families, I will argue in a concluding discussion that fiduciary practice within families of wealth becomes generalized into the ideology that justifies the function of an elite establishment in relation to American society.

#### THE FORMATION OF DYNASTIC FAMILIES AND THE POSITION OF FIDUCIARIES WITHIN THEM

Social historians of European and American capitalism have been concerned with how labor was disciplined to participate in rationalized

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production processes (see, for example, Thompson 1963), but very little systematic attention has been paid to the corresponding process by which capital was disciplined. During the era of American family capitalism, which was ended by the formation of great corporations in the early to mid-twentieth century, the generational transmission under centralized control of capital accumulated in family enterprise was a critical problem. It was even more so when one considers the historically concurrent blows to the bourgeois family: the strong encouragement of habits of consumption in a mass culture (see Ewen 1976) and particularly of conspicuous consumption by the rich; and the undermining of patriarchal authority, replaced by professional influence and a general "policing of the family" (see Donzelot 1979). Even since the 1930s, when the trend toward a manager-owner distinction at the core of business organization became firmly established (see Berle and Means 1932), the secure, collective family ownership of sizable chunks of working capital remained an important condition, not only for the now considerably autonomous corporate managers who used this capital, but also for the second- and third-generation guardians of family solidarity, including both professional fiduciaries and family leaders.

As a wealthy business family ages generationally, its reputation becomes firmly established in the context of its community, region, or nation, and it takes on both a mystique of patrician, old-wealth status in the eyes of its public<sup>3</sup> as well as functions of philanthropic work and public service that provide it with self-justification. Ironically, it is precisely during this period of transition from business to elite-community functions that such a family is potentially weakest as an organized entity. In generational aging and transition, a family must create a transcendent, controlling version of itself in the organization of its property to achieve a coherence of organization that can preserve the mystique of its name and ensure its continuing exercise of patrician functions in its social environment. This coherence does not come as much from commitments made by its members to their common lineage, as from the application of law and the work of fiduciaries whose primary responsibility is to protect the founder's legacy from divisive family quarrels.

The remainder of this section details the process of family development in which a fiduciary arises, injects a dynastic component into diffuse, volatile family relations, and monitors the linkages of family



and property through their gradual, anticipated decoupling. For simplicity, I will refer to the fiduciary as if it were one person, an inside-outsider, even though, as noted, the fiduciary role may be held by impersonal corporate trustees, or in particularly large fortunes, by complex staffs of inside-outsiders, who occupy no legally sanctioned position, but are collectively fiduciaries nonetheless.

Some variant of the model sketched here applies to all families of wealth in American society, but I am concerned particularly with those families which are most explicitly dynastic. It is important to understand that an unequivocal dynastic family structure does not always result from an equally clear and explicit dynastic motivation on the part of a family's founder. Families can acquire a dynastic character in spite of explicit intentions, merely because of the dynastic bias built into the conventionalized process of giving structure to private wealth. Also, from the external perspective of any wealthy family's public, there is a very widespread and interesting tendency to think "dynasty," regardless of the internal processes by which a rich family perpetuates, or fails to perpetuate, its organization. The cultural myth of dynasty as an apotheosis of family itself is, ironically, deeply held and easily attributed in a society where it is supposed to be an infrequent occurrence and an anachronism.

Any one or more of the following factors may place a family at the explicitly dynastic end of the continuum: sheer size of fortune and complexity of assets; dynastic motivation of the founder and subsequent leadership (this is the relatively rare case where a strong family tradition matches the strength of its rationalized organization in the hands of professional fiduciaries); and a public or business function in which family members actively make careers. At the other end of the continuum are modest fortunes, administered by trust companies, and families made dynastic by the mere existence of their relatively un-intrusive trusts.

A dynastic family is thus a structurally complex phenomenon, whose organization, initially defined by relationships among family members, comes in time to be embodied in the bureaucratically structured fortune itself.<sup>4</sup> The large popular, sociological, and social historical literature on the wealthy has tended to neglect the full constitutive significance of the formal processes by which a dynasty is created, while concentrating attention upon the activities of flesh-and-blood humans who bear the family name.<sup>5</sup> Wealth as a collective represen-

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tation constructed behind the scenes, so to speak, by the rational acts of the fiduciary becomes central in family organization precisely because it requires concentrated attention and dispassionate work for it to survive at all. In contrast, there is no compelling reason for descendants to maintain other than casual relations, *but* for the fact that their reified shared wealth intrudes constantly into their mutual relations and individual lives.

A simplified processual model of a dynastic family, which I have elaborated elsewhere (Marcus 1980), is based on the unraveling of the initial integration of family, business, and fortune into three differentiated functions that are associated with three separate kinds of organizations. From the second generation on, there are the users of capital (corporations) and the owners of capital, the latter in turn differentiated into those who control capital (the fiduciary, as trustee or inside-outsider) and those who enjoy capital (beneficiaries, including women and nonbusinessmen). After the first generation, the members of each organization are often limited to businesslike or indirect contacts with each other (although in the most tightly dynastic families, all three differentiated functions are performed under family leadership).

The differentiated ownership relation deserves the emphasis here. The mere holding of wealth in capitalism may appear to be totally passive, and wealth itself may seem monolithic and reified to its beneficiaries, except that it exerts a pervasive influence on their lives. Yet that same wealth, from the perspective of a fiduciary, is a very dynamic, animated set of processes that requires constant attention. In his relations with users of capital, the fiduciary is an investor, interested in money and values as abstractions within the conventions of investment institutions, or even in the operations of particular corporations, where family capital will be used in ways that cause it to grow or diminish. In his relations with beneficiaries, the fiduciary is a legal specialist and representative of his testator's plan. He literally realizes that plan for beneficiaries. He explains their rights and his duties in translating events in their lives into a calculus of legally regulated financial interests. On some occasions, he must demystify the reified nature of family wealth in offering advice; on others, he may need to reinforce the monolithic, reified quality of the wealth he controls to protect it from attempts by beneficiaries or others to fragment the corpus. In relation to the external society, the fiduciary consistently attends to

the boundaries of wealth as a structured entity, primarily in response to challenges by tax law and regulation. Although over the long term tax laws have made survival more difficult for dynastic families, they have also preserved breathing space for them (see Simon 1978). Thus, from behind the screen of a versatile professional practice, the fiduciary literally reconstructs a family's wealth for different purposes and in the alternative images or abstract forms that appropriately serve the needs of the family and its members' activities.

It should be noted that under capitalism an increased importance is accorded the fiduciary role precisely because wealth is an abstraction that constantly changes its form and is dependent on a coordinating human intermediary to perform these transformations. When the corpus of dynastic wealth could be maintained in a concrete form, it was a fixed symbolic resource that gave content to a living tradition among family members themselves. This was the role played, for example, by the landed estates of European aristocratic families. Under these conditions the fiduciary was much less autonomous and occupied a less central position. Only when land itself became marketable as a commodity, like any other, and agriculture became subject completely to commerce and contract did the fiduciary become more important in aristocratic societies (see Spring 1963).

As organized entities, dynasties are rarely stable structures in American capitalism, and they generally dissolve after three to four generations of evolution. Extended family members give priority to their own projects and gradually lose touch with family organizations that are maintained by the fiduciary. In turn, family capital becomes a less dominant influence in the operations of ancestral businesses or corporations. In the end, the most durable parts of a dynasty are the fiduciary-managed organization of patrimonial capital itself and the lingering public mystique of the family name. The duration of organized life for a dynastic family—typically about a century—reflects the legal limits imposed by the rule against perpetuities on the main resource of dynastic organization—the testamentary trust. However, one form of the trust—the charitable foundation—is permanent and well designed to achieve indefinite perpetuation, independent of concerns about distributing wealth for the enjoyment of beneficiaries. So, the waning of dynastic families is neither entirely required by, nor, in fact, entirely caused by legal dictates.

Friedman (1964: 550) has suggested that there are psychological

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limits to dynastic urge after about a century. Since I am not certain that such an urge is always present, at least in the minds of family members themselves, I would suggest that the conflicts, which inevitably break out in family relations in the absence of any strong cultural supports for the repair or discouragement of intensifying quarrels, eventually weaken dynastic organization sooner or later. Only the fiduciary control of wealth under appropriate arrangements can slow the process of dissolution, and finally outlast it through institutions such as foundations.

One might thus employ a duality to conceptualize the history of a dynastic family. On one hand, there is the transcendent version of the family created and managed by the fiduciary, that comes into being in the transmission of property from the first to second generation. On the other hand, there is some degree of development of family tradition, based on emotion, sentiment, and commitment, which shapes relations among extended family members (here the invention of family rituals, an oral tradition, and a collective memory are of key importance). Yet, in American society, the organizational capacity of the former, composed of law and money, to perpetuate families is much greater than that of the latter, and as such, it actually stunts the growth of a powerful family tradition by orienting individuals toward their interest in a collective structure of interests that was made and is managed for them, rather than by them. Whereas the family organization of capital is based on a system of rules and principles that is already *there*, so to speak, the organization of an autonomous family tradition must be achieved by *ad hoc* means that are not very clearly specified by cultural norms.

While the fiduciary occupies an intermediary position, in an overall structural sense, between family members and their wealth, the fiduciary himself, interestingly, is not usually an effective mediator in the family conflicts which threaten dynastic solidarity and usually bring about its weakening. His relationship with family members is too indirect, itself mediated by the distance of professional status, for him to get close enough to a family to help resolve conflicts once they have surfaced. Yet indirectly and in anticipation of family conflict, the fiduciary as planner can modify arrangements or give advice about the formal calculus of interest he controls in ways that may head off or at least blunt underlying tensions in family relations about which he dare do nothing directly. If he tries to mediate conflict in a personal way,

he only undercuts the position of disinterest on which trust in him is fundamentally legitimated. The fiduciary is most in jeopardy when he is asked to be a peacemaker by the family's leadership: when it is all over, he will very likely have difficulty returning to the sideline position where he has been most comfortable and effective. Thus, through what appear to be the little things, the day-to-day or periodic giving of advice when consulted, the fiduciary can have far-reaching effects on family relations. It is in this subtle sense that he is a mediator of intrafamily conflict.

Of course, this subtle mediation presumes that the fiduciary is the one person in the family who *is* a planner, who must be counted on to have a long-term, holistic view of the family and its financial interests in mind, so that, on the small matters with which he is constantly concerned, he can give advice that takes account of the broad significance of isolated choices. No one else in the family has a similar cognitive advantage except possibly the family leader, but the uses and nature of the fiduciary's holistic perspective are different from those of a leader, even though the two may serve as managers in different domains of family organization. The long-range view of the fiduciary is a by-product of the rational performance of professional tasks, whereas the long-range view of a leader reflects his personal aspirations, and is modified by the quality of his relations with extended family members. For their part, family members may oppose and resent the strictures of any holistic version of family that interferes in their personal affairs, in the form either of a fiduciary's administration or of a tradition nurtured by leadership.

Whereas a dynastic family can be held together without strong family leadership, it cannot survive without a fiduciary, whose primary task is to organize generational transitions. These are drawn-out processes that are not limited to a brief span of time, but rather begin early and end late in the development of two adjacent generations. In important ways the material wealth of a family and the relations of its members contain a common structure. As the family leader organizes family personnel, the fiduciary translates this organization into a financial structure. The fiduciary role varies in its salience among family members as a function of the character of a family's leadership. When second-generation family leadership is strong, the fiduciary as inside-outsider is placed behind the scenes and appears as a subordinated adviser. When family leadership is weak after the founding generation,

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the fiduciary as inside-outsider is a more salient presence to descendants, not only because he is the expert caretaker of the founder's legacy and their financial interest, but because of his past personal relationship with the founder himself, who carefully cultivated him.

A fiduciary as inside-outsider (as distinct from a corporate trustee) is usually recruited in a very personal way by the founder, who selects a lawyer or business protégé younger than himself, so that the latter will likely survive him and be able to implement their mutually devised plan of transition. The leadership of each generation recruits new fiduciaries, although the fiduciary in place, who provides the essential continuity between generations, has an obvious, almost compelling claim on the position. In the absence of strong leadership, part of the advisory function of inside-outsiders is to suggest their own replacement. If it is sufficiently disorganized, the family may finally be placed completely in the hands of a corporate fiduciary on the advice of its last inside-outsider. Just as the position of the fiduciary is defined as disinterested and professional, so the succession of fiduciary guidance is arranged in a rational, professional manner, while in contrast, leadership succession among family members is fraught with strong feeling, both negative and positive, and is the sensitive arena where the conflicts originate that eventually threaten unity among extended families.

### THE EVOLUTION OF DYNASTIC TRUSTS IN THE FORMATION OF AN UPPER-CLASS ELITE IN MASSACHUSETTS

The trust is a very old instrument of English common law, recent forms of which have been the basic organizational resource of American fiduciary practices. Although the legal development of trusts proceeded in the northeastern states during the early nineteenth century, their major dynastic features were systematically created in Massachusetts court cases from the 1820s through the 1880s. These features were to become the national fundamentals of trust practice and would provide the means to organize and transfer private wealth wherever business fortunes were amassed. Such concentrations occurred apace with urbanization across the country in the formation of an integrated national economy following the Civil War.

Massachusetts was indeed a very special context for the development of trust doctrines, since the latter occurred as part of a broader reor-

ganization of the older colonial merchant elite into a Bostonian capitalist class. The legal evolution of trusts must be understood within this larger framework of social change. Not only did Massachusetts provide the country with trust law, but its integrated development of business, charitable, and cultural institutions constituted a pure or extreme model of upper-class organization for the twentieth century. While this model was never replicated exactly elsewhere, its structural and ideological aspects diffused throughout the country by means of national professional networks involved in fiduciary functions and institution building, and more subtly, through the powerful influence that Massachusetts institutions such as Harvard had on institutional programs elsewhere. Trusteeship was both a technique of organization and a basic vision of purpose, and as structure and ideology, it has been a pervasive element within wealthy family groups as well as within privately funded institutions such as foundations and hospitals designed to perform public functions.

The development of trusts in Massachusetts has a complex social and legal history. I can address only the major moments in this development, especially as they pertain to the appearance of fiduciary functions as a key part in the formation of a Boston upper class. In this account, I have depended heavily on the seminal paper by Lawrence Friedman on dynastic trusts (1964), in which he noted the significance of Massachusetts as the locus of their development, and the valuable, brilliantly lucid history by Peter D. Hall (1973) of the concurrent development of trust doctrine and the intricate reformation of a Boston upper class for an industrial era.

Before the nineteenth century, testamentary practice was in a primitive state in America. Those who owned business property and were obliged to keep personal fortunes relatively intact relied on family strategies of intermarriage and partnership to offset the fragmentation caused by the partible inheritance. Although trust-like instruments were increasingly appearing in wills from the 1760s, and toward the end of the eighteenth century there were definite pressures on Massachusetts merchants to seek more rational and secure means of passing on their property undivided, the trust instrument could not serve a dynastic purpose until the state courts were granted equity jurisdiction by the legislature. Historically, in the common law there was a separation between courts of law and courts of equity (now completely merged), whereby the former had the power to determine titles but

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not to enforce duties, for which the latter courts were created. In his classic work, Austin Wakeman Scott (1939: 2.3: 32) defines a trust as

a fiduciary relationship with respect to property subjecting the person by whom the property is held to equitable duties to deal with the property for the benefit of another person, which arises as a result of a manifestation of an intention to create it.

The Massachusetts courts, with common-law jurisdiction, recognized the legal title of trustees to sell, rent, and make contracts upon patrimonial property, but without equity jurisdiction, they could not enforce the duties of trustees toward beneficiaries. As long as this was the case, the founders of fortunes and families could not securely plan for the disposition of their property by use of legally unregulated trusts.

The early uses of trust-like arrangements in Massachusetts wills were what Friedman called *caretaker* in nature (1964: 547). They provided for the protection of minors, widows, the elderly, and people with no business experience. The trustees were kin of the testator, who had to depend on literal trust and community opinion to ensure that the trustees discharged their duties. Hall shows how, toward the end of the eighteenth century, these caretaker functions of *de facto* trust arrangements in wills shifted subtly to dynastic purposes, where the end was not so much protection of particular survivors as keeping the testator's property itself intact across generations, against challenges of fragmentation from descendants or others.

The social and economic context of this shift was the great prosperity enjoyed by merchants in eastern Massachusetts around the middle of the eighteenth century and the resulting complex changes of business practice. Increasingly, the conduct of business required more specialized activity and a greater scale of operations and quantity of capital than could be easily accommodated by the partnership unit. Furthermore, with the pioneering creation of banks and insurance companies as sources of capital for expanding business activity, there were now stable investment opportunities to attract the patrimonial wealth of families, if this capital could only be held together. In this period, the idea arose of a perpetual dynastic principal or corpus, which would be wisely invested and the income from which would provide for the needs of heirs, who earlier would have divided the total corpus. Boston emerged as the center of this new activity, and by the early nineteenth



century, the aging founders of the first great Massachusetts fortunes were collected there, among whom a dynastic urge was both unself-conscious and strong. It is no accident, then, that trusts should have developed in a center of burgeoning activity and structural change among merchants, who, unlike the landed gentry of Massachusetts and other states, created intangible wealth as capital, for which legal forms and rules had to be invented appropriate to its different uses.

Because of the sheer amount of capital that was at stake in the increasing *de facto* use of trusts, lawyers, the Boston merchant community, existing banks, and the Massachusetts judiciary all began to press for equity jurisdiction, and in 1817, the state legislature granted it to the Supreme Judicial Court. The most important effect of the granting of equity jurisdiction was the rationalization of family-held concentrations of wealth, complementary to the rationalization of Massachusetts business activity in corporate form. Henceforth, the form of double ownership involved in a fiduciary relationship—ownership divided between the legal title of the trustee and the equitable title of the beneficiary—would be fully sanctioned and regulated by the state courts. Now that trust arrangements were legally regulated, the way was opened for professional rather than family management of fortunes and families.

From 1817, the legal features of trusts would be fully developed, not by legislative acts, but by a body of court opinions in trust cases. In effect, the trust was not a closely regulated creation of the state, under legislative control, but rather a natural and rationalized amalgam—a mechanism invested with both family feeling and calculated self-interest—within the social organization of the wealthy. Trusts were a device offered by government for private use by families, and regulation was introduced only through judicial decisions concerning those problems that families refused or were not able to manage themselves.

Because it was itself a part of the tight, upper-class culture of Boston, the judiciary was well disposed to the dynastic motive and was clearly biased toward it in deciding trust and estate cases. What made Massachusetts decisions so dynastic in purpose then was that across different issues judges favored the legality of the testator's instructions in wills and their implementation in the disposition of property against the claims of beneficiaries, creditors, or other interests.

Hall isolates three distinct periods in the judicial development of

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trust doctrine in Massachusetts between the 1820s and the 1880s. Interestingly, he suggests that the issues considered in each period were determined by the number of generations that had passed since the founding of early family trusts. The first group of issues—raised between 1824 and 1833—marked the dying off of the first makers of trusts and concerned such questions as the discretion and investment freedom of trustees, the length of time a trust could endure, and the immunity of trusts from the claims of creditors. The second group of issues, between 1855 and 1869, concerned the rights of beneficiaries under trusts, resulting from beneficiary challenges to trust provisions. The final group of issues, between 1869 and 1882, concerned the immunity of estates from the claims of third persons. It was during this period that the so-called spendthrift trust clause, ensuring such immunity, became firmly established, and trust doctrine in general matured, with ample clarification through a body of precedent. Aspects of this mature doctrine in time permeated the country and made dynastic trusts, and fiduciary relationships at their core, a common denominator of upper-class family organization nationally.

It is impossible here to go through the relevant cases, as Hall has, so I have chosen to highlight the major issues and doctrines with little or no attention to the details of the intricate cases and opinions in which they were manifest. Friedman perceptively argues that tax savings are really secondary to the dynastic aims of testamentary trusts, since it is not the beneficiaries who save taxes, but the disembodied ancestral legacy—the trust—which does. As he says (1964: 500), “Between the tax laws which subsidize the dynastic trust and the rules of future interests which limit their duration, lies the body of substantive trust law.” He then isolated (1964: 551) the three essential features that make a trust dynastic and its assets relatively indestructible: flexible investment powers of the trustees rather than the “straight and narrow path” for trust investment, so long sought by many states through the requirement of legal lists (lists of mandatory safe investments imposed on trustees); protection of the trust from interference by current beneficiaries, including curbs upon their power to cause termination of the trust; and protection from attempts by creditors or beneficiaries to reach trust assets (the spendthrift trust doctrine). In addition to the above three dynastic features, we should briefly consider why, if unlimited perpetuation is usually associated with dynastic intent, the dynasties of Boston chose not to attempt avoidance of the rule against

perpetuities, established in common law, which limited trusts to about a century of life.

Although all three main features of dynastic trusts served to shape the formal role of the trustee, the issue about trustee discretion, taken up early in Massachusetts, led to a direct and fundamental doctrine that established the autonomy of the trustee in the exercise of his duties. The *Harvard College v. Amory* case, decided in 1830, established the famous “prudent investor” rule which gave wide latitude to trustees in the investment of property. More important, the decision in this case recognized trustees as a putative professional class of trust managers in society (which they were in fact soon to become), rather than as just kinsmen or associates of the testator who had been encumbered with the legal responsibilities of trusteeship.

Briefly, Harvard College, one of the future beneficiaries of a fortune in trust, did not attack the actual management performance of Francis Amory, the surviving trustee. Rather, Harvard asked the court to define what was meant by a “prudent” investment. In its decision in favor of Amory, the court laid down a statement of principle which in a key passage claimed that the ideal trustee must “observe how men of prudence, discretion, and intelligence manage their own affairs.” As Friedman said (1964: 554), “This presupposes a certain class of trustees: men of business ability, whose social and economic position allows them easily to observe how their peers manage large estates for themselves or others. The test was more appropriate to the professional than to the amateur trustee who assumed trusteeship out of friendship or blood ties with the settlor.”

In its Boston context, the prudent investor rule as a reinforcement for the fiduciary role at the heart of the trust clearly served to facilitate the development of dynastic families. It contrasted with the legal lists and tight control of investment decisions imposed in other states. Not until the late nineteenth century was there an easing outside of Massachusetts of requirements for such legal lists. This coincided with the rapid spread of corporate trustees—trust companies—which outside Boston, dominated by the private trustee, played the role. The development of trust companies represented the general diffusion of the fiduciary function to serve the great number of personal fortunes that were amassed at the end of the century. The prudent investor rule (also known as the Massachusetts rule) only gradually was adopted nationwide—in the 1940s, in response to the need for flexibility, learned

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during the Great Depression, and in the 1950s and 1960s, in response to the opportunities presented by a long period of economic growth.

Hall has made much of the ways in which the prudent investor rule expanded the independence of trustees. As managers of private capital, they served a critical role as mediators who funneled the wealth of private fortunes into key Boston financial institutions that, in turn, backed selected business enterprises through periods of boom and depression during the nineteenth century. The professional trustee—private or corporate—completed the institutional integration of a stable capitalist class. While those in business who used capital took risks, the trustees who invested in these businesses acted as a brake on risk because of their duties to beneficiaries.

The rule, in essence, established a clearer separation between the enjoyment of wealth and the management of wealth, and this distinction in turn became the animating focus of an active, rather than passive, ownership function in capitalist society. As Hall said (1973: 242):

Such a development was of great importance in the light of the occupational diversity that was being encouraged among the sons of merchants. For the specialization of the management of family capital made possible the underwriting of non-business careers for the descendants of merchants; it was possible for such persons to be rich without having to bear any of the responsibilities of creating and maintaining wealth. In short, it is at this point that we begin to see the development of a *class* out of what had previously been a group of persons with common economic interests.

In the 1830s and 1840s there was a famous, seemingly endless controversy in the courts about an estate involving family members who were simultaneously trustees, executors, and beneficiaries (the Boott-Brooks-Lowell controversy; see Hall 1973: 254–68). This dispute clearly suggested the need for the professionalization of the trustee position. With capital tied up in ambitious manufacturing and railroad ventures, it became even more important to prevent cases that would endanger capital in family quarrels.

In the second period of trust issues (1855–60), the rights of beneficiaries were clarified in case decisions that increased discretionary powers of trustees and greatly limited the ability of beneficiaries to modify or interpret trust provisions in their favor. For example, stock dividends paid by trust investments were to become part of principal

rather than income (cash dividends would become income), and trustees had leverage in deciding whether dividends would be paid as stock or cash. Such decisions, which favored trust arrangements over beneficiary interests, strengthened the hand of the trustee, who maintained the living embodiment of the testator's will. Furthermore, although sometimes successful, beneficiary challenges were essential learning experiences for professional trustees who designed better techniques for making fortunes indestructible.

At roughly the same time, trustee work was becoming increasingly professionalized, and in Boston it became a specialized branch of the legal profession. Important corporate trustees developed in Boston, such as the powerful Massachusetts Hospital Life Insurance Company, but there was a distinct preference for private trustees, who combined personalized and professional service to their fortunes and families, somewhat analogous to a family doctor. By the 1850s, there was a category of such professionals, and they assumed an almost sacred status. As Hall said (1973: 282): "They were required to become 'economically celibate': barred from being beneficiaries under the trusts that they administered; barred from business activities which might vitiate their loyalties to the interests of the trusts." Because merchants had earlier encouraged their children to go into professions rather than business, those offspring who eventually specialized as trustees had themselves been socialized into dynastic families, and as a result were prepared culturally and ideologically to assume the management of other dynastic families' money.

While the milieu in which fiduciary ideology developed did not exactly reappear in its entirety anywhere outside Massachusetts, the ideology itself spread wherever trusts organized accumulated private wealth. Also, the ideology soon came to provide a charter for upper-class activities generally.

The final period of trust development (1869–88) hardened the consistent rulings of Massachusetts courts since the 1820s through the spendthrift trust doctrine, which in a definitive way protected the trust entity from the creditors of beneficiaries. A number of cases, both in Massachusetts and by this time (the 1870s) in other states as well, established the complete immunity of trust principal and income, if a beneficiary had not received it, from seizure by creditors.<sup>6</sup> In Massachusetts, an important 1882 case ruled in favor of the protection of trust income and principal from the claims of creditors. Thus, the

long development of dynastic trust features, which in early periods strengthened the internal organization of trusts by strengthening and elaborating the position of the fiduciary, was capped by the spendthrift trust doctrine which reinforced the viability of the trust entity itself against external threats.

Perhaps because it was so explicitly dynastic in nature and so widespread in its use, the spendthrift trust doctrine was a matter of hot debate among legal scholars and the judiciary during the 1880s. Some critics saw it as just poor judicial reasoning, isolated from any blatant social motive. Conservative critics saw it as a crutch leading to a weakening of the will of the upper class, in favor of caution bred by the desire to protect the accumulation of wealth. Liberal critics took, in astonishment, the spendthrift trust doctrine for what it was: the protection of dynastic organizations in a supposedly laissez-faire economy and democratic society.

Finally, it may seem puzzling that the rule against perpetuities, well established in the common law, was embraced so affirmatively in an early case (1833, *Nightingale v. Burrell*) in the development of Massachusetts trust doctrine. This case resulted in the limitation of testamentary trusts to about a century in length. Hall (1973: 251–52) explains this explicit and motivated affirmation of the rule in terms of the mentality of merchants who established trusts. While wanting to preserve their fortunes for generations to come, they also balanced against this aspiration an understanding that tying capital up in trusts would ultimately impede trade and business growth, which was their lifeblood. A legal limit to the duration of trusts was thus a compromise between dynastic motives and a business-market mentality. Also, Hall suggests that in the context of the social-class formation then occurring in Boston, perpetual family dynasties unto themselves would be divisive to a new kind of class cohesion, based on elite cooperation within closely linked bureaucratic institutions. The limitation on trusts fit in well with the emphasis in Boston on the building of specialized institutions, created by family wealth, but which would eventually be autonomous from any group of dominating family organizations.

The diminution of the power of individual families, which at the same time were given formal place in the new upper-class order of Boston, leads to a brief discussion of the total context in which trust doctrine developed. The nineteenth-century formation of the Boston upper class involved an externalization and rationalization through

institution building of social functions previously exercised within wealthy business families. The family, organized bureaucratically by trusts, was now subordinated as a social unit to the institutions that it created and that assumed its functions. Trusts and fiduciaries preserved organized families, but moved them as units to the sidelines of activity, while freeing their personnel to take up professions and to occupy leadership positions in the new complex of cultural and business institutions. Still, family organizations, preserved by fiduciaries, remained as the shadow structure and idiom by which the diversely occupied professionals and patrons of new institutions “placed” each other and identified their common interests. The trust and fiduciary thus gave the dynastic family a formal identity and a way of functioning in a social environment where it no longer could itself organize the large-scale and complex activities of industrializing economy.

Aside from business, merchant families had previously engaged in various charitable activities that were better undertaken by distinct, rationalized institutions. The organization of philanthropy now became tied to the fates of those who were merely to enjoy wealth as the beneficiaries of capital used by others. Some members and branches of families remained in business, but in the nineteenth century there was strong encouragement for the children of wealthy merchants to go into professions—law, medicine, and education—where they would perform cultural and charitable functions in society at large without draining the family capital or seeking to interfere with its management. As a result of the influx of beneficiaries into the professions and education, the nature of the professions themselves changed. For example, medicine was not previously a high-status occupation. As the sons of elite families became doctors and philanthropy created hospitals for them, the institutions of health and medicine became imbued with an ethic of public service.

In many respects, the cultural function in society of professionally trained offspring of merchant families came to resemble that of the fiduciary-trustee. Just as, within their families, the trustee avoided involvement in family politics in order to preserve the family’s purer, ancestral legacy of wealth, so the professionally active children of Boston families became metaphorical fiduciaries of the public order from within cultural and philanthropically supported institutions. In actual practice, they routinely became the legal trustees of the foundations and institutions that their ancestral fortunes supported. The

notion that public projects could and should be performed by private organizations became firmly established, and was applied also to the coordinated efforts of businessmen who organized public works that might otherwise have been the projects of government. What Hall has demonstrated so well is that this development toward public fiduciary roles did not in fact dissociate the professionals from the business functions that they appeared on the surface to have abandoned. In Boston, as perhaps nowhere else, there was a complex, coherent intertwining of charitable institutions, banks, educational institutions, and business corporations, not only in their financial structures, but also in the crosscutting involvements of trustees who often served concurrently in the leadership of several key organizations.

The philanthropic foundation, which supported the professions and education, became the organizational niche in which the perpetuation of particular families could be realized.<sup>7</sup> The foundation was a kind of trust entity whose life-span was unlimited by law, and later had considerable tax advantages. It provided a framework in which beneficiaries of family trusts could themselves become private fiduciaries, not of family fortunes, but of the public order in general. It was this ideological and structural expansion of the fiduciary role in philanthropic, intellectual, and professional endeavors that later gave a style to an otherwise difficult-to-define American Establishment in recent history (for an excellent discussion of this perceptually murky phenomenon, see Silk and Silk 1980).

In the application of the Boston model in areas beyond Massachusetts, where dynastic families were less tightly integrated into upper-class institutions, the trustee-fiduciary position was filled in alternative ways, especially by corporate trustees. In the case of modest fortunes, or families that did not maintain substantive business or philanthropic functions, or were not distinguished by the reputation of several of their members in a field of endeavor such as politics, the dynastic element was embodied only in the impersonal corporate trustee, and the family itself was, in essence, a failed dynasty save for the faceless, disembodied way in which its patrimonial wealth was managed. In contrast, sizable fortunes and important families that were involved either directly in business or philanthropic functions needed a fiduciary who would play a role—like that of the career Boston private trustee—of mediation in family affairs, even though their testamentary trusts might be managed by bank trust departments. (I have often found,



however, that particularly wealthy families have controlling ownership interests in the banks that manage their trusts.)

The inside-outsiders developed by these families are informal fiduciaries, who are sometimes also formal trustees under law, but are usually more intimate with the families they serve and are often fully employed by a single family. While expected to be intimately knowledgeable about the family and to act impersonally, they must contend with family leaders or factions without a legal framework which formally defines their position. But this does not make their position as precarious as it might appear, because they are not expected by the family to affiliate or take sides. They are given independence by family leaders, who recruit other, more partisan advisers, because it is an outside, distanced perspective that the family wants. The transcendence of the fiduciary is thus mutually sustained by the fiduciary and those he serves.<sup>8</sup>

The inside-outsider usually occupies either the executive officer position in a family's holding company or the executive directorship of the family's foundation. Since many families maintain a substantive dynastic family organization based centrally on the foundation instrument, the executive directorship of a foundation is often the key formal position for an inside-outsider to occupy. The next section will describe the fiduciary position of an inside-outsider in Houston, Texas, which, although younger than Boston, has long been a place where great fortunes are accumulated. These fortunes have been organized by the use of instruments and techniques that were systematically defined in legal doctrine in Massachusetts over a century ago.

#### THE IDEOLOGY AND POSITION OF CONTEMPORARY FAMILY FIDUCIARIES: A CASE FROM HOUSTON, TEXAS

Georg Simmel said in his work *The Philosophy of Money* (1978: 511), "The ideal purpose of money, as well as of the law, is to be a measure of things without being measured itself, a purpose that can be realized only by an endless development." Part of this endless development is the fiduciary-trustee who is, in relation to a family of wealth, the concrete human incarnation of this abstract functioning of law and money. In a sense the fiduciary is the authoritative interpreter, in a legal and capitalist idiom, of a rich family's constitution

and development, seen by family members themselves in a much less rational and holistic way. The trust as a reified phenomenon, constructed by the work of the fiduciary, occupies, after the death of the family founder, the place of abstract patriarchal authority in a family, but what family beneficiaries literally trust is not an object or person imbued with positive family values such as love, amity, and warm feelings, but a cold, rational construct of wealth—the trust and its trustee—that legitimates itself and gains their confidence by transcending entirely the arena of family interests and emotions. So, paraphrasing Simmel, it could be said that the fiduciary provides powerful means for interpreting and understanding family life without exposing this means itself to interpretation beyond the mere affirmation of its authority. Ironically then, in capitalist society, a form of lineage and dynasty finds its strength in a mechanism that is defined by a rationality that appears alien to the mix of sentiments and self-interest which we think motivates family relations.

Family members may use such personal terms as *wise*, *honorable*, *a good person*, or *trustworthy* to describe the fiduciary who administers their collective wealth, but the fiduciary's self-image, or the one to which he will freely admit, is framed by three concepts that limit discussion about values (they are thus "thin" rather than "thick" in normative content): disinterest, service or stewardship,<sup>9</sup> and rationality.

Although disinterest, service-stewardship, and rationality are all terms or labels used commonly by fiduciaries in explaining their position to me, I also use them here as my own interpretive concepts. The resemblance between the everyday usage of informants and the analytic usage of the ethnographer in this context is understandable, for fiduciaries, as literate persons, become quite self-conscious about their practice and position in relation to wealthy families. On one hand, they consult and sometimes contribute to a large technical literature bearing upon the conduct of their profession. On the other hand, they are often avid, self-reflective readers of the social histories of great national dynastic families such as the Rockefellers and Mellons, whom, in another time or place, they might have served. Such reading also gives them an idiom and an awareness of a tradition in which to explain their profession to themselves and others in sociological terms.<sup>10</sup>

The three ideological elements that underlie a fiduciary's practice must be explained against the background of a cultural world in which social relations are presumed to be motivated by considerations of self-

interest. In American society, a preferred way of talking about events is in terms of the opposing or matching self-interests of the interacting parties. This is the conventional way of perceiving relations among people who are strangers, acquaintances, or workplace associates. Family relations are the one subset of social relations which are supposedly a haven from the world of interests. But, because family members are also members of society at large, they perceive their relations as a jumbled mix of interest and caring where motivations for behavior always appear ambiguous. Shifting, ambivalent interpretations of the motivations of their relatives especially plague members of wealthy families in which a structure of high-stake financial interests is superimposed on sentiments. Family members, who are also financial partners, are obliged on normative and practical grounds to trust each other, but this trust never goes unquestioned. Such relationships where trust is assumed to inhere in them are therefore in many ways more problematic than relationships of business or friendship, for example, in which trust is presumed to be largely absent until conspicuously demonstrated.

The fiduciary who serves the public order, or a family of property, gains a certain transcendent position of trust precisely because he rises above interests to a state of *disinterest*. By claiming a neutrality to the world of interests, the fiduciary gains legitimacy to comment on and act for those who are interested without being subject to their suspicions. Although the public or patrons may not always be easily convinced of the fiduciary's neutrality of interest, a claim of disinterest is the most essential element of his ideology.

The second element is a claim to service or stewardship, not to the ongoing and individual interests of particular persons, which if claimed, would be a contradiction to the stance of disinterest, but to the Durkheimian whole that is more than the sum of its parts. In the public fiduciary's case, it is stewardship dedicated to "maintaining the social system" in almost an abstract Parsonian sense. In the private fiduciary's case, it is stewardship devoted to realizing the will of the founder and perpetuating his wealth in a framework of trusts and philanthropy. In both cases, the idea of stewardship for the sake of perpetuation entails doing for interested parties or ambivalently interacting family members what they could not do for themselves or what they may not even want done. Like disinterest, the idea of stewardship emphasizes a moral superiority of professional practice, independent of the specific goals

it serves. The term describes only a type of function; the human qualities expected of someone who performs this function are left unspecified.

The third ideological element is rationality. Ironically, the fiduciary himself may not be "interested" in his beneficiaries' personal affairs, but his view of his tasks as a rational problem solver is totally expressed in the language of interests, which is the conceptual currency of professional fields such as law and business. Seeing the world in a means-ends, cost-benefit framework, the fiduciary must express the morass of conflicting emotions and interests in family affairs in a consistent, orderly interpretation. The fiduciary must apply a calculus that ranks the various interests and emotions relative to each other in accordance with the rules and doctrines of law, and he must chart a course that can be achieved by approved practices in business and investment activity. While the fiduciary's technical knowledge is complex, professionally he must provide simple and elegant solutions to problems that cannot be resolved by family members themselves, among whom dispassionate management is made impossible by family passions. Fiduciary practice thus operates by a doctrine similar to judicial ignorance, where the rigid exclusion of seemingly extraneous matters in hearing cases makes for efficiency in resolving them. The fiduciary can thus be depended upon to be coldly rational, and a family's trust in him lies in this capacity.

While a private fiduciary must be close to the family in order to know it, the ideological elements of his professional practice all tend to place him at a distance. The characteristics expected of a fiduciary are also those required for success in almost any kind of endeavor in rationalized social orders. By its reputation as a formula for success and despite its remoteness, the style of expert rationality is legitimated in family contexts, when combined with disinterest and an ethic of service, as behavior worthy of trust.

An important question is whether the fiduciary himself believes he can conform fully to such emotionally thin principles as disinterest, stewardship dedicated to an abstraction rather than to real people, and the rationalist interpretation of events. This is a version of the broader question of how rigorously a professional can prevent his personal reactions and values from influencing his conduct and judgment. The family fiduciary as a professional is in a much more difficult position than the psychiatrist, for example, who sees many clients, and then

only for short periods of time. While a fiduciary may have little face-to-face interaction with family members, their collective interests are his continuous concern. Although I found that fiduciaries had very insightful and opinionated views of the families they worked for, they themselves believed that they successfully kept their personal opinions separate and distant from their professional practice. They stated that they found this distance most difficult to maintain in their relations with the family leader or founder—usually an older man—who recruited them, but, looking ahead to the next generation, they found it easy to maintain in their involvements with the founder's children. Aging fiduciaries, or those who had retired, were the most openly self-reflective informants.

*Family Fortune X and Its Inside-Outsider, Smith*

Houston "old" wealth is relatively new in national terms. The fortunes of many Houston families originated in some aspect of the expanding oil industry of the early twentieth century. At the present time, leadership in these families is being transferred from an aging second generation to a young adult third generation, although in several cases oil fortunes from the pioneer period remain under the control of aging family founders. Also, some families, which I have studied in the Houston-Galveston area, and which are highly organized in business and philanthropy, were established over a century ago by merchants and bankers who served post-Civil War Texas frontier society. All these fortunes contrast with contemporary new wealth, rapidly accumulated in the last three decades during boom times in the Sunbelt.

Family X is now a distinct entity (based on the autonomous organization of its own accumulated fortune), which is a branch of a family whose founders were innovators in oil industry technology. In its fourth generation, this older family is now thoroughly dispersed and some of its other branches, like Family X, also form autonomously organized dynasties in their own right. A, the founder of Family X, married into the original founding family of the oil technology company, and made his fortune as a high-level executive in the operations as well as from his own investments. A died in the early 1970s, leaving a widow and five adult children—three sons and two daughters.

A began to plan for the continuity of his family and fortune in the

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1950s at about the time the company was making the transition from a closely held and operated family corporation to a manager-run corporation with publicly held stock. At that time, there was a clear ultimatum from management to executives that they could stay as company men, but if they identified with the family, they must go. Most of the family members left active positions in the company, but the core of their personal fortunes remained (and still remains) as sizable stockholdings of this extremely prosperous corporation. I am unaware of an instance where the considerable potential weight of the collective holdings of the branches of the original family has been intentionally concentrated to influence, as an ownership bloc, some policy or decision of the company. The tradition of holding company stock is strong among the various branches, and it is in fact a good investment for dynastic capital, but the branches act as separate groups from their various locales in Europe and America.

In the early 1950s, A had carefully cultivated his young executive assistant (my informant, Smith) to be his family's future inside-outsider. A very warm personal relationship developed between them. From an old Houston family of modest income, Smith felt that he had been made a cultured person—taught taste and discernment—by A, who was a European. Officially, Smith was an executive in the original family's oil technology company, but he became increasingly involved in the personal business affairs of A, who encouraged Smith, a lawyer, to increase his knowledge of trust and estates law. A left the company after the shift to a more managerial operation, but Smith stayed on, successfully leading a double life, so to speak, as a corporate manager on one side, and an owner's fiduciary on the other.

Thoroughly familiar with A's desires for the future of his family and fortune, Smith began to translate A's wishes into a formal legal structure, which would shape relations among A's heirs. In consultation with A, Smith set up a number of trusts for each of the children, which would self-destruct according to a schedule. Parts of the corpus would be gradually released at different ages to each of the children, and by the age of forty-five, each would have total control over their entire share of the corpus. Thus the children through involvement in their own projects and investments would have several chances to make mistakes and learn from them before their patrimony was put totally at risk. The central notion of both A and Smith in designing this structure was that to entirely protect the corpus in a paternalistic way

would ruin the beneficiaries as persons, would make them indecisive and lacking in responsibility. Yet, the fact that they programmed for anticipated failure in releasing shares suggests an interesting, general pessimism about children developing under the shelter of wealth, even one's own. It would be Smith's job to design, implement, and protect this structure, which expressed A's view of his family, and to provide advice to beneficiaries on problems they might have with it in their life situations. This then was a mixed caretaker-dynastic use of the trust, weighted more toward a caretaker function.

In addition, A and Smith created with a sizable portion of the former's wealth a foundation for the arts in which A and his wife had long been interested. This was the clearly dynastic dimension of A and Smith's planning. Such a foundation would provide the family with a patrician stature locally and nationally, would be permanent, and would function in a distinguished way despite possible personal failures by individual beneficiaries. For those family members who wanted it, philanthropy would offer something between a career and a hobby. Smith emphasized to me that a foundation for the arts, rather than, say, for a hospital, university, or medical research, was an enhancement to a family's stature and placed its members in elite networks of regional, national, and international scope.

When A died, Smith left the oil technology company and became the executive director of Family X's foundation. From this position and as adviser to A's widow, Smith was the overall administrator of A's fortune, put into a form which now provided a legal structure, identifying Family X as an upper-class entity to its public and influencing relations among A's children and their families. Smith, rather than an anonymous trust department of a bank, was the trustee for the children's personal trusts, and he oversaw the gradual release of their corpus shares to them, while devoting himself mainly to foundation management.

After about ten years in this position, Smith recently retired from his fiduciary role in Family X and is now concerned with a leisurely management of his own investments. Over the years, he amassed a large personal fortune, still based primarily on holdings in the oil technology company. Most of the work of guiding the turnover of trust corpus to A's children has been accomplished. While Smith is open to consultation with Family X members, and now can be more open and personal with them, he is definitely out of the day-to-day man-

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agement of Family X's affairs. To my knowledge, there is now an interregnum of sorts in the organization of Family X without a generalized fiduciary acting in the capacity of executive director of the foundation. Smith may be a key consultant to A's widow and the more active children in selecting his successor.

### *Smith's Expression of the Fiduciary's Ideology of Disinterest, Stewardship, and Rationality*

In discussions with Smith, stewardship was the only one of the three concepts which he used explicitly (and repeatedly) as a shorthand way of describing his function in relation to Family X. He was very well read in the historical genre on family dynasties, both fictional and nonfictional, and often found in these works many resemblances to his own life and career situation. In his more diffuse discourse, however, it was clear that Smith was also expressing both his transcendent disinterest in the individual personal affairs of A's widow or his children, and his reductionist, rational management of family affairs when they concerned an issue that was hopelessly jumbled by the sentiment and interests of the family members involved. His own feeling was that family matters were always, in different measures, about feelings and financial standing, so he was constantly monitoring them, and when called upon to act, he would always simplify and reduce matters to a set of options that posed a problem of rational choice. So, in Smith's case, disinterest and rationality were complementary, but less well articulated elements compared to the concept of stewardship, which expressed a condensed view of his function in his own mind and in explanations to others.

*Disinterest* It was Smith and his wife who set the informal boundaries on how far they would socialize with the second generation of Family X. On their parts, A's children were open to a much closer, surrogate paternalism from Smith and his family. But, in line with both the "cut the cord" mentality of A and the necessity for him, as fiduciary, to maintain professional independence, Smith carefully categorized and limited his family's social activities with those of Family X to occasions in which an element of business would always be explicitly involved. According to standard trustee practice, Smith managed his own investments separately from those of A's children, even



though there was much overlapping ownership of ancestral oil technology company stock. Finally, as a rule, Smith would discuss Family X's affairs only with other estate and trust professionals.

*Stewardship* While Smith had great respect and fondness for A, and explicitly admitted loyalty to the structure of wealth which reflected his will, he had in contrast a curiously low, if not slightly disdainful, opinion of the abilities of A's children. None were seen by him as competent business persons. Rather they were likely to be wasters of their own money and a threat or obstruction to what was being achieved by the foundation operations. Like A, Smith felt that the survival of the family would be based on its art collection and patronage. Smith respected A's widow, who dominated the foundation, and submitted to her wishes, but she was also very dependent upon his managerial skills. It is clear that Smith saw himself as steward to the fortune rather than to the family, although he was always available to work out family problems, individual or collective, that family members apparently could not resolve themselves.

*Rationality* His low opinion of the competence of heirs raised under the shelter of money, and the complex, tension-laden process by which a family group came to decisions on its own reinforced Smith's confidence in the rationality of his practice and the advantages of his transcendent position. He thought that principles of law and economics were flexible enough to translate any desire of a founder of a fortune and family into a rational design and structure that needed only disinterested, rational stewardship. For example, I asked him what would be an optimum dynastic strategy for a family founder in contemporary America. He answered that one should tie up one's total wealth in a huge tract of undeveloped land, with development potential, but which would lose such potential if fragmented prematurely. This would force a family to stay together more closely and to be more dependent on its patrimonial property than any alternative ownership situation. Interestingly, Smith was suggesting a kind of regentrification of a bourgeois elite, with the use of land as the secure base of lineage. He admitted this would be a highly idiosyncratic occurrence. Short of such an extreme, deliberately dynastic plan, the foundation is the most useful dynastic instrument, suited to a society where it is difficult to maintain the solidarity of extended families. Smith emphasized that

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whatever the structural arrangements, a dynastic plan must include a fiduciary role, above the fray of family politics, to provide dispassionate management by nonfamily professionals.

Finally, Smith was quite aware that his comments to me were threaded with his personal judgments, opinions, and feelings about living members of the family he served, but he believed that these areas of thought were separable from and irrelevant to his work as a fiduciary. He admitted that he was serving primarily a disembodied will and the abstract structure of law and economics that gave it shape, and only secondarily a concrete group of persons. He told me he would not have agreed to our discussions if he were still Family X's fiduciary, not because he could not reveal family scandals (he did not, in fact, reveal any to me), but because it might have undermined in the eyes of the family his pose as a disinterested, rational steward of the family's wealth. It was not his place or business as fiduciary to talk about the family; he could discuss the family fortune as an object of law and investment, but only to other professionals. The fact that family members themselves might speak to me made all the difference, since they were free to express opinions in ways that he as fiduciary had not been. It was precisely this transcendent untouchability and anonymity that vested Smith with an almost sanctified authority and trustworthiness for the second generation of Family X.

## CONCLUSION

The diffusion of the model perfected in nineteenth-century Boston carried to other regions two central features of American elite culture. The model provided an enduring organizational mode for the limited perpetuation of wealthy families as interest groups in American society, and it supplied an ideology of moral leadership by upper-class institutions and their personnel in a democratic polity and market economy. These legacies were rooted in the fiduciary concept as developed by the legal evolution of trusts, which solved the problem of redefining the private ownership of wealth as capital for an industrial age. The dynastic milieu in which Massachusetts trust doctrine was historically formed became a programmed part of the law of trusts in its wider applications. This was a result of a tendency, internal to the American legal system, toward formalizing—making consistent and uniformly applying—evolving issues of law as rules. Furthermore, this tendency

has been particularly strong in areas of law that have been perceived to bear upon basic, relatively unchanging aspects of social relations, such as the law of trusts with its antiquity in common law. Thus, to the extent that the formative Massachusetts law shaped generalized trust doctrine as an area of law characterized by relative continuity, the use of trusts itself has routinely entailed a dynastic bias. Trusts have made dynasties out of wealthy families even where there may not have been a dynastic motive. In such cases, dynasties have largely been fashioned by the professional work of fiduciaries, whose basic resource has been the trust instrument and its legal tradition.

A dynastic bias introduced into a situation of uncertain dynastic intent characterizes Family X of Houston. Working within the law of trusts and following the instructions of his employer, Smith planned for the orderly dissolution of part of the fortune by vesting control in beneficiaries. With the rest of the fortune, a foundation in the arts was established that would preserve the reputation of the family. This was clearly a mixed strategy. It provided for the deliberate dissolution of apparently dynastic, but in fact caretaker, trusts, but at the same time used the permanent foundation instrument to guarantee the perpetuation of the family name, independent of the acts of the trust beneficiaries. It reflects well the essential ambivalence that exists today among wealthy families about the dynastic bias historically built into the legal instruments they have used to transfer property.

The generalization of the fiduciary role as an upper-class ideology of purpose on a national scale can be traced historically to the powerful cultural and organizational influence of the nineteenth-century Massachusetts model across the country. The core of this nineteenth-century model, in which the upper class serves as fiduciary to society, can in turn be linked to the systematic evolution in a legal context of the fiduciary idea, so essential both to the internal organization of elite families and to enabling an integrated upper-class dominion in Boston. It is remarkable how structurally and ideologically similar are latter-day American Establishment institutions, described most recently by Silk and Silk (1980), to the fiduciary function in the trust context. These institutions oversee the play of political and economic interests in society from a higher plane of moral authority, legitimated not by positively stated values or a "thick" ideology, but by the fiduciary's principles of disinterest, stewardship, and rationality. In human terms, Establishment members may be viewed—or may wish to be viewed—

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as those who possess wisdom, honor, and other generally valued traits, but the Establishment in fact defines itself only by the normatively “thin” principles of the fiduciary, which are well suited to an age of bureaucratic and mass organizations.

In effect, the situation of society at large is analogous to the internal relations of a family of property. In the latter, as in the former, the basis for trust, cooperative relations, and moral authority in a domain of extended family relations had been eroded by the dominance of self-interest motives within the notion of contract as a pervasive cultural model. There was no longer a tradition of the ancestor’s authority, and there were no cultural supports for the sharing of property in ways that could hold extended families together. The invention and use of the trust and trustee—the legally recognized fiduciary—imposed a facsimile of literal, morally laden trust on family members. Concentrations of private capital could then be transferred generationally intact and under centralized control so that both the businesses and collective social stature of a family could survive their founder. The position of fiduciary, filled by professionals, became the organizational core and the principal source of authority and trust at the heart of a dynastic family.

A remaining question is whether there may be an additional linkage between the fiduciary role and ideology, historically embedded in the makeup of the contemporary American Establishment, and the recent trend in law, noted by Jethro Lieberman (1981), in which relations of contract are being redefined on the basis of a fiduciary ethic. According to Lieberman, the regime of contract has served to undermine the quality of trust, otherwise naturally a dimension of social relationships. As part of a gradual twentieth-century reaction to the impersonality of contract, the general legal imposition of standards of care in relationships, on the analogy of a trustee’s duties to beneficiaries, forcibly reintroduces considerations of trust into social relations. Very speculatively, one might say that the twentieth-century American Establishment’s ability to legitimate itself by the ideological devices of the nineteenth-century Massachusetts model has considerably diminished, certainly in public eyes, and perhaps even in its own. This erosion of confidence in the elite’s ability to lead by serving can perhaps be traced to the failures of those who were perceived as Establishment figures during the Kennedy-Johnson years (see Halberstam 1972). Such public exposure and responsibility in the act of government itself are of course

great risks to anyone in a fiduciary capacity, where survival depends on a low-profile stance in relation to those served.

Whether or not it was approved of, the influence of an American Establishment—not a ruling class, but a class of talented public fiduciaries—had been widely believed in. Now with a general lack of trust in the Establishment fiduciary ideology, which placed it above political and economic interests, a vacuum exists in which it is unclear who or what mechanisms will ensure that the play of interests can be checked or limited. One might see the trend in law toward reinjecting trust directly into the diversity of social relationships as a filling of this vacuum in a way that infuses by policy the fiduciary ethic into society itself rather than permitting it to be narrowly held in trust, so to speak, by a semisacred elite. Interestingly, this infusion of the fiduciary ethic has not manifested itself in the form of an official preaching or urging for a return to values of family, amity, and community in place of the normatively cold assumptions of contract (although the counter-culture and moral majority might be seen as *unofficial*, ideologically opposite attempts to fill the moral vacuum in this way). More realistically in a thoroughly corporate and bureaucratized society, law and government policy have moved toward the one alternative to historic views of contract that is nonetheless still consistent with the formal definition and structuring of social phenomena in rationalized orders, but that also imposes a duty of trust on those whose activities in society have in the past been modeled in law by a more rigid view of contractual relations. This is the fiduciary duty that for so long has been conceived as a crucial feature in the preservation of upper-class social organization, and in generalized form, that has justified the upper class in a public role of leadership through service.

#### AFTERWORD

It is worth making a retrospective observation about the significance of the kind of analysis developed in this paper for a now theoretically stagnant framework in the study of kin groups, pioneered by British social anthropology. In British social anthropology's central concern with the study of kinship, a focus on descent groups was emphasized by Radcliffe-Brown and second-generation scholars such as Gluckman and Fortes, who were concerned with African societies. Models of kinship and descent groups were constructed through considerable

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borrowing of concepts from English jurisprudence, especially from the works of legal scholars such as McLennan and Maine. In particular, a conception of corporation and of relationships as codes of rights and duties came from these legal scholars, who themselves began their schemes of legal evolution with a consideration of the constitution of so-called primitive societies.

While these legalistic notions of relationships seemed to fit African societies, British descent theory was severely challenged in the late 1950s and the 1960s as a result of both new intellectual influences (for example, the impact of models from linguistics) and the fact that it did not seem to work in many other places where anthropologists conducted fieldwork. Legalistically inspired descent theory seemed to overdetermine and make overly concrete the phenomena of group formation in numerous societies, where in cognition and on the level of action social structures were much more fluid. Social structure conceived as conscious models and given form in the cognitive, categorical organization of groups—kinship as a phenomenon of the mind and symbols—became a much more popular approach to the study of kin groups.

While not attempting to resurrect descent theory in its old form, I wish merely to point out that the study of kinship and descent groups in rationalized orders justified (and requires) the attention given to legal conceptualizations by earlier British theorists, who were admittedly seeking a perspective for other analytical purposes. In rationalized orders, matters of law permeate social life, perhaps most strikingly among families of wealth. Ironically, the attempts to define a cultural analysis of American kinship, free from action systems and social forms (see D. Schneider 1968), were at least partly inspired by thinking back upon what was learned about kinship in the triumph of the category-cognitive perspective over the older legalistic, sociological perspective in this field. But this cultural account of kinship in a rationalized order is inadequate precisely to the degree that it does not reflect contextual variation in social form (see Yanagisako 1979), or the powerful impact of legal forms and ideas on the cultural definition of kinship, as in the case of the upper-class variant of kinship considered in this paper (see Farber 1981 for at least some sensitivity to the relationship between law and kinship as a cultural phenomenon). Thus, in the study of our own societies, the legalistic notions underlying British descent theory are very relevant to cultural analysis. These legal concepts should be

an integral part of a perspective on kinship in societies where they evolved historically and where they appropriately belong as thoroughly indigenous cultural categories and structures.

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### NOTES

1. By *corporate*, I refer here to the classic notion of groups, with a life of their own, that endure as organizations beyond the lives of their individual members.

2. Because of its frequent use in this paper, the word *rationalized* (or *rationalization*) deserves some comment. By it, I refer to the historic trend of social organization in Western industrial, capitalist societies toward the formalization of all relationships according to standards of efficiency, objectivity, and logical simplicity. If there is a single principle or theme which defines the culture of capitalist society, it is this permeating trend toward the objective and uniform. Law is perhaps the major regulative institution that monitors this formal dimension of all relationships. Rationalization was the key concept employed by Max Weber to characterize industrial, bureaucratic societies. From a Marxian perspective, rationalization is merely the spread of the discipline of social relations, achieved in capitalist production, to all aspects of society.

3. It is commonplace to note how much popular appetite there has always been for what appears to be aristocracy in a democratic society (witness the perennial popularity of nonfictional and fictional dynastic family sagas) where in principle it should be opposed, and in historic fact the conditions for viable dynastic formations should have disappeared by the late twentieth century. Any number of suggestions can explain the love-hate orientation to real and fictional dynastic families maintained in the popular imagination. I favor the notion that the dynasties that have particularly excited the American imagination represent the logical extreme of the success myth—from rags to riches and then back to rags in the dramatic version, from bland affluence to riches and then back to comfortable, but anonymous living for several generations in the anticlimactic version. The essential point is that part of the popular appeal of dynasties is their temporality—that their decline and decadence are just as fascinating as their rise to fabulous wealth. This popular perception of a finite cycling of American dynasties is not only in keeping with American values, but is roughly accurate in regard to the real-life pattern. The patrician,

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old-wealth phase is merely the apogee of what families can achieve for a time—life at a higher plane, enjoying wealth ownership, free from their mundane, self-interested business origins. Any public awe or trust in old wealth is based on the belief that such families have managed a disinterested transcendence of their business origins, in other words, on grounds like those that form the basis for trust in trustees by families of old wealth themselves.

4. Perhaps the best example of this shift is the alienation of the fourth-generation Rockefeller cousins from involvement in the formidable family institutions created by the third-generation brothers and their inside-outsiders. This peripheralization of an extended family in regard to its transcendent version is vividly described by Collier and Horowitz (1976). Roughly the same process has occurred among the Mellons, DuPonts, and Guggenheims, as is evident from recent accounts.

5. One interesting recent demonstration of the popular, simplistic inclination to assume that the activities of dynastic families are centrally coordinated by family leaders and their kin was a televised confrontation between Bunker Hunt of the Dallas Hunt family and the chairman of a congressional committee that was investigating the Hunts' disastrous attempt to corner the silver market. As background, the congressman, assuming that the two Hunt brothers were at the center of an empire that was fully under their control, asked how much the Hunts were worth in totality. This is a standard question posed to wealthy families, and Hunt's answer was that it depends on which assets and which Hunts you were talking about, indicating that what outsiders saw as a unity should be seen as an immensely complex phenomenon with many centers of control—some strongly coordinated, others weakly coordinated, and others totally isolated. The congressman remained incredulous, but given the particular complexity of the Hunt fortune and family as well as the argument developed in this paper, it was, on the surface, a plausible answer, however truthful it was.

6. A seminal decision issued from a U.S. Supreme Court review in 1875 of a Rhode Island case (*Nicholas v. Eaton*) went further than any previous lower-court decisions in protecting trust assets and income from the creditors of beneficiaries.

7. There had been considerable early debate in various states about the legal status of charitable trusts. This debate was based on suspicions precisely over the dynastic implications of their perpetuity (see Miller 1961). For a more recent, but not atypical argument linking foundations to dynastic organization and ways the federal tax system subsidizes them, see Simon 1978.

8. The *consiglieri* of Mafia families, fictionally represented by Mario Puzo in *The Godfather*, are a good illustration of inside-outsiders. The character Tom is recruited by adoption into a kinship-conscious family organization. He is a lawyer and is not a conflict or crisis manager as much as a constant adviser to the family's leader. The maintenance of a certain distance from family quarrels is scrupulously imposed on Tom by Don Corleone, rather than self-imposed. In more than one case among members of Texas families I interviewed, what I have called the inside-outsider was explained to me



with a reference to Puzo's *consiglieri*. In these references, the tone was always humorous, but it was nonetheless a clarifying analogy which came obviously to mind.

9. I am very well aware that "stewardship," an explicit term of justification which was frequently used by the rich in nineteenth-century America, comes from a religious context and that the ideological roots of the American Establishment must be seen as at least partly derived from the Protestantism of the business founders of fortunes and families. Silk and Silk (1980) emphasize this religious origin. While the specific religious connotations of stewardship have faded, the ideals of disinterested, rational service among the Establishment did not. Establishment institutions, although built upon the wealth of businessmen who were often imbued with a sense of purpose that was phrased in religious terms, were not built by the fortune creators themselves. Rather, they were devised by men who often stood in fiduciary or inside-outsider relationships to them as their servants. Thus, I consider the more subtle, but secular family managerial roots of the Establishment in the fiduciary position to be more significant than the religiosity of founders, who increasingly turned over their projects to inside-outsiders.

10. Note that while the fiduciary on the public scene—the wealthy patrician family itself—needs an ideology of justification, the professional private fiduciary within such families does not need an explicit justification, even though the public fiduciary role seems to have been modeled historically on the private fiduciary function within dynastic family organization. Ironically, it is to the developed fiduciary ideology, writ large, of the great dynastic families, that latter-day private trustees and inside-outsiders must return for a sociological conceptualization of their own practice when called upon by the ethnographer to provide it.



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**Elites***Ethnographic Issues*

This book is a collection of chapters focusing on the role elites—the rich, powerful, and privileged in any society—play in shaping modern societies. The concept of elite carries with it the notion that such groups are the major source of change within particular levels of social organization. “Elite” as a casual term evokes three broad qualities—agency, exclusivity, and some sort of relationship with the “non-elite.” Critiquing the treatment accorded elites as subjects in recent Western social thought, the contributors reflect upon past results and explore directions that anthropologists might take in the ethnographic investigation of elite groups.

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