CHAPTER 26

Historical Analysis of Political Processes

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Good sociology takes history seriously. Good political sociology, however, takes more than political history seriously. If political sociology is to escape from the cramped prison of the present, it must address directly the ways in which time and place affect the character of political processes. Reviewing visions of historical explanation before turning to specific political processes, this chapter urges a renewed search for robust causal mechanisms and processes in history.

Here is the plan. First, consider when explanation (as opposed to description, interpretation, and critique) should concern historical students of political processes. Second, review competing conceptions of explanation, arriving at reasons for concentrating on mechanism-based explanations. Third, inventory, compare, and refine strategies for historical analysis. Fourth, examine the practical explanatory program implied by historically grounded mechanism-based analysis. Finally, the bulk of the chapter illustrates that program by pursuing (1) robust mechanisms and processes, (2) explanation of puzzling features in historical episodes, (3) explanation of puzzling features in whole classes of historical episodes, and, very briefly, (4) detection of analogies among ostensibly dissimilar episodes. The enterprise centers on generation of visibly viable explanations for complex political processes.

Not all sociologists regard explanation as a feasible or laudable end for their inquiries. Sociology could, after all, probably survive as a valued discipline without offering powerful explanations of the phenomena its practitioners study. Sociologists can usefully describe current social conditions, unmask official claims, join moral and political debates, chart directions of change, document social differences, evaluate consequences of social interventions, or supply information to decision makers and social movement activists. All these useful sociological enterprises can proceed with no more than crude conceptions of cause–effect relations. In fact, most of what professional sociologists actually do these days belongs to one or more of these pursuits.

Historical analysis of political processes more often pursues cause–effect relations. Nevertheless, even it need not center on causes and effects. Consider the place of explanation

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in sociology's major contemporary forms of historical analysis: historical social criticism, pattern identification, scope extension, and process analysis.

Historical social criticism reconstructs the past on the way to informing human choices in the present and future. We do not need a compelling explanation of capitalism to reflect intelligently on its costs and benefits for human welfare. Historical pattern identification searches for recurrent structures and sequences across time and space: standard configurations and trajectories for industrialization, for revolution, for secularization, or perhaps for societal development as a whole. That venerable sociological enterprise usually makes some gestures toward explanation, but often settles practically for identifying parallels among cases. Historical scope extension applies techniques, models, or generalizations that sociologists have developed in studies of contemporary social life to historical situations. As in the case of pattern identification, the application of demographic or network models to past settings may involve explaining what happened in those settings, but it often ends with no more than identification of similarities and differences.

Finally, historical process analysis examines how social interactions impinge on each other in space and time. Instead of considering space and time as additional variables, it presumes that space–time connections define social processes and that social processes operate differently as a function of their placement in space and time. As in the previous modes of inquiry, process analysis may reasonably ask largely descriptive questions, for example, whether in a given period and region epidemics, fads, money, artifacts, and news, for whatever reasons, followed essentially the same communication lines. Process analysis lends itself to historical explanation more effectively than do historical social criticism, pattern identification, and scope extension because it explicitly draws attention to temporal and spatial interdependencies. But it is still possible to practice process analysis without much effort at explanation. None of sociology's standard modes of historical analysis, then, absolutely requires a focus on explanation.

Explanations begin to matter when sociologists become intellectually ambitious. Three circumstances make the character and quality of explanation crucial:

- Sociologists attempt to identify similarities and differences in the workings of ostensibly distinct social processes such as war, democratization, nationalism, ethnic conflict, and social movements.
- Sociologists seek to confront or integrate their accounts of social processes with those prevailing in adjacent disciplines such as anthropology, neuroscience, economics, evolutionary biology, linguistics, psychology, geography, history, or political science.
- Theorists in one or more of these adjacent disciplines propose to subsume sociological findings under their own explanatory schemes.

In all these circumstances, bad explanations cause serious trouble for sociologists. In the liveliest sectors of political sociology, as it happens, all three circumstances prevail.

That is notably true of historical analysis. There, sociologists face the challenge of explaining similarities and intersections of apparently disparate forms of politics, confront competing explanations in adjacent disciplines, and encounter many an economist, historian, political scientist, psychologist, or evolutionary biologist who claims to have identified the fundamental explanations of political processes. Sociologists who want to make advances in historical analyses of war, revolution, state formation, democratization, nationalism, social movements, and contentious politics at large have little choice but to take explanatory

problems seriously. Both competing explanations and competing views of explanation confront each other in the historical analysis of political processes.

In the long run, a discipline's intellectual vivacity and viability depend on its capacity to generate superior explanations. This discussion therefore addresses students of sociological theory who actually want to recognize, fashion, or verify explanations of historically situated political processes. They have a choice of explanatory strategies. In sociology as a whole, four conceptions of explanation vie vigorously for attention:

1. *Covering law* accounts consider explanation to consist of subjecting robust empirical generalizations to higher and higher level generalizations, the most general of all standing as laws. In such accounts, models are invariant—they work the same in all conditions. Investigators search for necessary and sufficient conditions of stipulated outcomes, those outcomes often conceived of as "dependent variables." Studies of covariation among presumed causes and presumed effects therefore serve as validity tests for proposed explanations. Thus some students of democratization hope to state the general conditions under which any nondemocratic polity whatsoever becomes democratic.

2. *Propensity* accounts consider explanation to consist of reconstructing a given actor's state at the threshold of action, with that state variously stipulated as motivation, consciousness, need, organization, or momentum. Explanatory methods of choice then range from sympathetic interpretation to reductionism, psychological or otherwise. Thus some students of social movements compare the experiences of different social groupings with deindustrialization in an effort to explain why some groupings resist and others disintegrate.

3. Although authors of covering law and propensity accounts sometimes use the language of systems, *system* explanations strictly speaking consist of specifying the place of some event, structure, or process within a larger self-maintaining set of interdependent elements, showing how the event, structure, or process in question serves and/or results from interactions among the larger set of elements. Thus some students of peasant revolt explain its presence or absence by peasants' degree of integration into society as a whole

4. *Mechanism-based* accounts select salient features of episodes, or significant differences among episodes, and explain them by identifying robust mechanisms of relatively general scope within those episodes. As compared with covering law, propensity, and system approaches, mechanism-based explanations aim at modest ends: selective explanation of salient features by means of partial causal analogies. Thus some students of nationalism try to relate its intensity to the extent and character of competition among ethnic entrepreneurs. In such accounts, competition for political constituencies becomes a central (but not exclusive or sufficient) mechanism in the generation of nationalism.

System explanations have lost ground in sociology since the days of Pitirim Sorokin and Talcott Parsons, but they still figure prominently in some sorts of organizational analysis and demography. When today's sociologists fight about explanation, however, they generally pit covering law against propensity accounts, with the first often donning the costume of Science and the second the garb of Interpretation. Explanation by means of robust causal mechanisms has received much less self-conscious attention from sociological methodologists than have covering law, propensity, and system explanations. Nevertheless, a significant body of thought recommends the mechanistic approach (see e.g., Bunge 1997, 1998; Hedström & Swedberg, 1998; Elster, 1989; Little, 1991, 1998; Stinchcombe, 1991). This chapter accordingly pursues mechanisms and processes.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL PROCESSES?

Let us include as political all social processes in which governments figure significantly. (Governments are organizations controlling the principal concentrated means of coercion within substantial bounded territories and exercising priority in some regards over all other organizations operating within the same territories.) By such a criterion, war, revolution, and democratization clearly qualify as political processes, but communication, exploitation, and production only qualify as political processes when and if governments become parties to them. Of course, governments often do become parties to communication, exploitation, and production.

We can adopt either a weak or a strong definition of historical analysis. The weak version simply deals with events and processes that have taken place before the present. All study of the past, in the weak version, constitutes historical analysis. The strong version demands more. It identifies ways that (1) when and where an event or process occurs affect (2) how it occurs, (3) why it occurs, and (4) with what consequences it occurs. Strong-version historical studies of democratization, for example, examine how and why democratization takes various forms and has disparate impacts on the quality of life in different periods and regions. Although plenty of work in historical sociology—notably including much of scope extension—depends on the weak definition, here I stress the strong definition. Historical analysis of political processes, for present purposes, means systematic description and explanation of social processes involving governments, processes whose character varies significantly as a function of their location in space and time.

The strong definition excludes two extremes: random or unique events and processes that operate identically everywhere, every time they occur. But it excludes few if any significant political processes. All complex, major political processes operate differently in different times and places. That is so chiefly for three reasons: (1) all political processes incorporate institutions, understandings, and practices that have accumulated historically in their current sites; (2) prior iterations of a given process affect its subsequent iterations; and (3) processes that acquire the same names often result from different causes.

Why? Political processes such as social movements and civil wars incorporate institutions, understandings, and practices that have accumulated historically in their current sites; despite some family resemblances between 17th-century English civil wars and recent civil wars in the Congo/Zaïre, the two unfolded differently because of their historical settings. Prior iterations of a process, say, revolution or religious mobilization, affect subsequent iterations by providing models for participants, by altering possible participants' estimates of likely outcomes to various possible interactions, by transforming relations among possible participants and third parties. Finally, complex episodes that acquire the same names (e.g., genocide or nationalism) often result from different causes, as in the diverse sequences that produced political independence and international recognition for Algeria, Croatia, and Uzbekistan. Historical analysts therefore must examine how prior iterations of a process affect its subsequent iterations, how political processes incorporate locally accumulated institutions and practices, as well as how causally heterogeneous episodes acquire the same public names.

Interesting choices arise at precisely this point:

1. Since political processes incorporate institutions, understandings, and practices that accumulate historically in their current sites, analysts might plausibly follow the lead of historians, who remain skeptical about general analyses of those processes. Instead

of creating general schemata for all civil wars or all social movements, terre à terre historians prefer to integrate their civil wars and social movements into well-documented historical contexts.

2. Since prior iterations of a given process affect its subsequent iterations, however, analysts might plausibly follow the lead of historical sociologists by creating subfields to encompass distinct processes: a sociology of revolution, another sociology of democratization, a third sociology of war, and so on. This choice relies on the presumption that each of these forms has a distinctive, continuous organizational and causal structure, even if one iteration affects the next.
3. Since causally heterogeneous political processes often acquire the same names, finally, analysts might plausibly concentrate on a twofold strategy: get explanation right by regrouping processes into causally similar categories, but treat the application of a certain name (e.g., this is a revolution, that is genocide) to a political process as a phenomenon deserving explanation for its own sake.

My own preferred intellectual strategy combines 1 and 3, but subordinates 1 to 3. It searches for very general political mechanisms and processes—mechanisms and processes that transcend such categories as revolution, democratization, and war—but seeks to explain how they articulate with locally accumulated institutions, understandings, and practices. Strategy 2 then comes into play not as a form of explanation, but as a heuristic; it helps clarify what we must explain.

Notice the ambitious program of inquiry that follows. We must combine theoretical and empirical work as we identify significant mechanisms and processes that recur across a variety of times, places, and circumstances. We must specify interactions between those mechanisms and processes, on one side, and the contexts within which they operate: to what extent and how, for example, do outcomes of mobilization processes vary as a function of initial conditions? We must trace causal connections between one iteration of a mechanism or process and the next. We must finally examine how relatively general mechanisms and processes incorporate or respond to locally accumulated institutions, understandings, and practices. In short, we must undertake serious historical work without getting lost in historical particularism.

For the work at hand, let us adopt a simple conceptual apparatus: episodes (connected sets of events that include phenomena requiring explanation), causal mechanisms (events altering relations among some specified set of elements), processes (causal chains, sequences, and combinations), and explanation (identification of mechanisms and processes that produce crucial political phenomena). After explicating each of these concepts, we can turn to their use in accounting for concrete political events.

First we delineate one or more episodes: conveniently or conventionally bounded, connected sets of events that include phenomena requiring explanation. In some fields of political analysis, researchers already have developed standard ways of identifying comparable episodes: strikes, contentious gatherings, wars, events, revolutionary situations, and the like (Azar & Ben-Dak, 1973; Brockett, 1992; Cioffi-Revilla, 1990; Diani & Eyerman, 1992; Favre, Fillieule, & Mayer, 1997; Gurr & Harff, 1994; Shapiro & Markoff, 1998; Small & Singer, 1982; Sugimoto, 1981; Tilly & Rule, 1965; White, 1993). In these methods, researchers either accept conventional definitions of the events in question (e.g., official listings of strikes) or construct a priori definitions, applying them uniformly to the available evidence (as is common in the study of "protest events": Franzosi, 1998; Mueller, 1997; Oliver & Meyers, 1999; Olzak, 1989; Rucht & Koopmans, 1999; Rucht, Koopmans, & Neidhardt, 1998). In principle, it also should be possible to use criteria of internal connectedness to delineate

comparable events (see, e.g., Bearman, Faris, & Moody, 1999). But that approach has not yet been much tried in historical studies of political processes.

After delineation of episodes, we proceed to locate causal mechanisms within the episodes. Mechanisms are events that alter relations among some specified set of elements, as, for example, a broker's creation of a connection between two previously unconnected groups alters the two groups' behavior. We can conveniently distinguish among cognitive, relational, and environmental mechanisms. Cognitive mechanisms operate through alterations of individual and collective perception; words like "recognize," "understand," "reinterpret," and "classify" characterize such mechanisms. Relational mechanisms alter connections among people, groups, and interpersonal networks; words like "ally," "attack," "subordinate," and "appease" convey a sense of relational mechanisms. Environmental mechanisms apply external influences on the conditions affecting political processes; words like "disappear," "enrich," "expand," and "disintegrate," applied not to actors but their settings, suggest the sorts of cause–effect connections in question. For explanatory purposes, then, we search especially for cognitive, relational, and environmental mechanisms that operate in similar fashion across a wide variety of settings.

Mechanisms concatenate into broader processes. Processes are causal chains, sequences, and combinations. They deserve recognition as robust when they occur in similar ways across a variety of settings and circumstances. Polarization provides an example of a fairly robust political process that recurs widely. Polarization combines mechanisms of category formation, coalition formation, opportunity/threat spirals, and brokerage: creation of a named boundary with organized relations across and on either side of the boundary; development of coordinated action among two or more actors on each side of the boundary; signaling–reaction sequences that increase distance between the two sides; establishment of interlocutors (brokers) representing each side.

Explanation, in this mechanism-based approach, follows two complementary paths. First, it pursues particular mechanisms and processes across different settings, investigating how they work. Thus a general interest in polarization processes leads to close investigation of category formation, coalition formation, opportunity/threat spirals, and brokerage in different conditions and locales. When do they arise, how do they operate, what produces their effects? Any such investigation is likely to establish that some of its premises erred: that category formation is not uniform across settings, that opportunity/threat spirals reduce to more elementary mechanisms, and so on.

Second, explanation entails identifying problematic features of episodes or classes of episodes, then discovering what mechanisms and processes produce those problematic features. The study of episodes is likely to involve close comparison, but not in the style of John Stuart Mill's classic methods of agreement, difference, residues, and concomitant variation. Instead, the most prized comparisons will show whether the mechanisms and processes in question do indeed qualify as robust, operating similarly in disparate conditions.

Put more schematically, the analytical program that follows has several different versions:

- Single out, describe, and explain a single robust mechanism or process, demonstrating its operation in a variety of episodes.
- Identify puzzling features of a given episode, then use systematic comparison with other episodes to locate robust mechanisms and processes producing those puzzling features.
- Do the same thing for a whole class of similar episodes.
- Identify partial causal analogies among ostensibly dissimilar episodes and classes of episodes by locating the same mechanisms and processes within them.

All four versions integrate theory with empirical investigation. None can begin without both some empirical sense of the phenomena under investigation and at least a crude theory of their operation. The remainder of this chapter illustrates those four procedures. It emphasizes relational (rather than cognitive or environmental) mechanisms on the ground that they have received insufficient attention from historical analysts of political processes. More narrowly, it concentrates on mechanisms and processes that create, transform, and activate political identities: public, collective answers to the questions "Who are we," "Who are you," and "Who are they." For the most part, analysts have treated political identities phenomenologically, considering them as aspects of individual or collective consciousness. A closer look, however, reveals the organizational bases of political identities.

ROBUST MECHANISMS AND PROCESSES

A number of identity processes depend on, among other things, the twinned mechanisms of certification and decertification: validation (or devalidation) of actors, their performances, and their claims by external authorities. It is the political version of a very general phenomenon. Pondering why weak, peripheral Sweden entered Europe's raging war in 1630, Erik Ringmar reflects on that general phenomenon:

> I will stress the social character of identities: people alone cannot decide who or what they are, but any such decision is always taken together with others. We need *recognition* for the persons we take ourselves to be, and only *as recognized* can we conclusively come to establish an identity. The quest for recognition will consequently come to occupy much of the time of people or groups who are uncertain regarding who they are. We all want to be taken seriously and be treated with respect; we all want to be recognized as the kinds of persons we claim to be. Yet recognition is rarely automatic and before we gain it we are often required to prove that our interpretations of ourselves indeed do fit us. In order to provide such proof we are often forced to *act*—we must *fight* in order to convince people regarding the applicability of our self-descriptions. (Ringmar, 1996, pp. 13–14)

Ringmar's language conveys the unfortunate implication that certification is chiefly a way of satisfying a psychological need. His analysis of Sweden's intervention in the Thirty Years War, however, amply demonstrates that much more than national self-satisfaction was at stake: international recognition of Sweden as a great power because of its war-making prowess altered its relations to all other European powers, gave its diplomacy credibility it previously lacked, and affected the policies of its European neighbors.

The treaties of Westphalia (1648) that ended the Thirty Years War, indeed, established a new set of powers, now identified as sovereign states, constituting both the certified major actors on the European scene and collectively the certifiers of arrivals and departures on the scene. At the same time, they decertified the Holy Roman Empire (which still nominally included a number of the newly sovereign states) as exclusive international interlocutor for its members. For two centuries thereafter, successors of the great powers continued the process of certification and eventually extended it to all the world's states.

Beginning with the French Revolution and Napoleon's conquests, the certification process took on a national twist. Increasingly, Europeans built national and international politics around the equation of nation with state. That equation appears in two competing versions: (1) we have a state and therefore have the right to create our own nation; and (2) we are a nation and therefore have the right to our own state. The first qualifies as state-led nationalism, the second as state-seeking nationalism. State-led nationalism encouraged rulers to impose national languages, official histories, ceremonies, legal systems, and sometimes other cultural

forms, which meant subordinating or suppressing other languages, ceremonies, legal systems, and cultural forms. State-seeking nationalism encouraged aspiring leaders of autonomous political units to resist state-led nationalism in the name of distinctive languages, histories, cultural forms, and prior occupation of a territory. In both cases, external powers played pivotal parts: certifying current rulers as authentic rulers of their nations, certifying claimants to independence as valid representatives of authentic nations.

The certification/decertification process actually occurs in every polity, whether international, national, or local in scale. Every polity implicitly establishes a roster of those political actors that have rights to exist, to act, to make claims, and/or to draw routinely on government-controlled resources; it maps members and challengers. So doing, every polity also implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) broadcasts criteria for acceptable political organization, membership, identity, activity, and claim making. Some organizations specialize in surveillance and certification of acceptable or unacceptable versions of organization, membership, identity, activity, and claim making. To take an extreme but significant example, in 1945 the powers that settled World War II, redrawing the European map extensively as they did so, ceded their work of recognizing valid states to the United Nations. During the vast wave of decolonization that soon followed, United Nations officials spent much of their effort screening performances and claims in the form:

- We are a distinct nation and therefore we deserve a state of our own.
- We are an unjustly oppressed people and therefore we deserve a state of our own.
- We were once an independent state and deserve to be independent again.
- Our colonial masters are ready to concede independence to us.
- Our claims to lead a new state are more valid than our rivals'.

Each claim entailed performances by aspiring national leaders—performances displaying evidence of legal rights, leadership, administrative capacity, popular support, internal military control, economic viability, and backing from at least some great powers. Those performances had to be polyvalent, establishing credibility simultaneously with very different audiences, some of them at odds with each other. The minimum set included not only United Nations officials, but also leaders of former colonial powers, constituencies at home, rival claimants to represent the nation in question, and rulers of adjacent states, who were often making their own territorial claims at the same time. Coached by representatives of great powers, United Nations officials rejected far more claims in this vein than they accepted, but they still certified well over 100 new states, with their proposed rulers and forms of government, between 1945 and 1990.

In this extreme case, the world's great powers created an international bureaucracy that radically standardized claim making in its arena. But similar processes operate less bureaucratically and at a smaller scale throughout the world of contentious politics. Every regime sorts forms of organization, publicly asserted identities, and forms of collective interaction along the continuum from prescribed to tolerated to forbidden. Indeed, a good deal of political struggle concerns which forms of organization, which identities, and which forms of collective interaction the regime in power should prescribe, tolerate, or forbid.

Consider South Asia. What people loosely call Hindu nationalism in India centers on the demand for priority in these regards to Hinduism as defined by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a coordinating organization that originated in Nagpur in 1925. Since the RSS claims that Sikhs and Buddhists are actually Hindus, its program emphasizes state certification of the categorical pair Hindu/Muslim (Tambiah, 1996, pp. 244–245). It remains to be seen whether an RSS government in power would actually write its whole program into law. Mean-

while, in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka representatives of other religious categories struggle for legal priority.

Regimes, including South Asian regimes, differ momentously in which kinds of organization, identity, and collective interaction they prescribe, tolerate, and forbid. But all of them create procedures for public screening of acceptability in these regards; those procedures crystallize as laws, registers, surveillance, police practice, subsidies, organizations of public space, and repressive policies. In South Asia and elsewhere, group certification as a valid interlocutor for a major religious category gives serious weight to an organization or a network of leaders.

Certification and decertification, then, appear to work in similar fashions over an enormous variety of situations. They qualify as robust mechanisms. In the company of other mechanisms such as brokerage, category formation, and object shift, furthermore, they concatenate into fairly robust, wide-ranging processes of identity formation and change. Theorists of nationalism, genocide, ethnic mobilization, state formation, social movements, revolution, coups d'état, and a variety of other historically grounded political processes have much to learn from close attention to certification and decertification.

PUZZLING FEATURES OF PARTICULAR EPISODES

A second version of the mechanism-based analytical program identifies puzzling features of a given episode, then uses systematic comparison with other episodes to locate robust mechanisms and processes producing those puzzling features. Instead of resorting to historical particularism or searching for covering laws to subsume the entire episode, it focuses on causes of the puzzling features. The Soviet Union's disintegration poses just such puzzles:

1. How did a political economy that seemed so solid, centralized, authoritarian, and resourceful disintegrate visibly in 5 or 6 years?
2. Why did so much of the contentious claim making take the form of ethnic and national self-assertion?
3. How then did so many old regime power holders reappear in positions of power after the great transformation?

Partial answers lie in the intersection of four robust mechanisms: opportunity spirals, identity shift, competition, and brokerage. Opportunity spirals involve shifting and expanding likely consequences of available claim-making actions. Identity shift (often coupled with certification or decertification) realigns prevailing collective, public answers to the questions "Who are you," "Who are we," and "Who are they." Competition consists of striving among several actors within a reward-allocating arena. Brokerage finally consists of establishing, severing, or realigning connections among social sites. These familiar mechanisms intersected with weighty consequences in the Soviet Union and its successor states after the mid-1980s. My short sketch of Soviet history will concentrate on placing the four crucial mechanisms in historical context, without spelling out comparisons to other instances of imperial disintegration on which my analysis implicitly relies (Barkey & von Hagen, 1997). Furthermore, it will not make crucial regional distinctions, for example, the Baltics versus the Caucusus, that a more detailed analysis would require.

The Soviet Union formed in the ruins of war and revolution. Its imperial predecessor took heavy losses from its battering by Germany and Austria in World War I, losing control of

Russian Poland and the Baltic provinces in the process. Workers' strikes and soldiers' mutinies in 1917 coupled with resistance of the Duma (national assembly) in driving the tsar to abdicate and a conservative–liberal provisional government to take power. Soon insurrectionary countergovernments of workers and soldiers were forming at the local and regional level, as Bolshevik leaders such as Lenin and Trotsky returned from exile. Struggle swirled around multiple factions and issues, but by November 1917 the Bolsheviks had gained enough ground to seize power from the provisional government.

Between 1917 and 1921, the Bolsheviks had their hands full simply keeping together what remained of the Russian empire. Through civil war and peace settlements Russia lost Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Finland, and Poland. The new state only regained control of the Caucasus, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Ukraine, and Moldavia through military conquest by a hastily assembled Red Army that enrolled 5 million men at its peak. With great effort Lenin, Trotsky, and their collaborators returned the country to civilian control by locating a tightly disciplined Communist party (itself recruited in part from former or present military men) within a large centralized bureaucracy. With Stalin's takeover (and expulsion of Trotsky) in 1927, the Soviet Union moved into a phase of forced-draft industrialization, agricultural collectivization, bureaucratic expansion, and increasingly authoritarian deployment of the Communist party as an instrument of central power.

Broadly speaking, Stalin's regime imposed direct centralized rule on Russia, but relied on a distinctive version of indirect rule elsewhere in the Union. In nominally autonomous political units of the Soviet Union outside of Russia, the Kremlin typically assigned one ethnic identity (e.g., Uzbek, Armenian) priority and appointed party bosses of those ethnicities who had proven their loyalty to the central party. Such regional leaders enjoyed great autonomy and priority within their regions so long as their constituencies delivered compliance, goods, and services to the center. In public life, the titular national language and culture enjoyed equal standing with Russian language and culture, at the expense of the many other cultural forms that ordinarily coexisted in any region.

The late 1930s and the 1940s brought momentous changes to the Soviet Union's national scope. Its leaders began one of history's most massive military mobilizations. Allied temporarily with Nazi Germany, the Soviets occupied half of Poland, reduced Finland to little more than a satellite state, and absorbed Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia directly into the Union. As a devastating war ended, the peace settlement awarded a battered Soviet Union hegemony over former Axis allies Romania, Bulgaria, and Hungary, not to mention Axis conquests Czechoslovakia and Poland. Although Russian rule remained somewhat more indirect in its Central European satellites than within the Soviet Union's internationally recognized boundaries, the system of Communist party control, Russian presence, and heavy circulation between Moscow and peripheral capitals prevailed throughout what in 1955 became the Warsaw Pact.

Even more so than before World War II, the postwar Soviet economy and polity depended on the combination of three elements: (1) maintenance of formidable military might, (2) large-scale coordination and division of labor in the production and distribution of subsistence goods, and (3) close surveillance and control of all political expression. The three elements in their turn produced paradoxical results:

- Subordination of production for consumers to heavy industrial development.
- Movement of military and party authorities toward a modus vivendi after the chilly relations that had characterized them before the war.
- Enormous strength in the mathematics, physics, and engineering fields on which

military development in competition with the United States increasingly relied, a strength whose by-products were flows of mathematically trained intellectuals into adjacent fields and the creation of protected sites of quiet political dissent.

- Pockets of privilege for party officials, senior military officers, regional leaders, and key professionals, privilege all the more visible for its contrast with the physical hardships and incessant shortages of Soviet life experienced by most of the population.
- Immense underground networks of mutual assistance, information, evasion, and supply, almost all of them technically illegal, but most of them actually indispensable to the everyday survival of Soviet citizens and enterprises (see Feige, 1998; Ledeneva, 1998; Solnick, 1998).

All of these processes became more visible—and fateful—in the Soviet Union's disintegration.

How did it happen? At the time, Soviet assistance in Afghanistan's left-leaning military coup of 1979 seemed like just one more Cold War contretemps, but it proved crucial. As the United States poured in support for a variety of Afghan rebels, the Soviet military suffered a frustrating and humiliating stalemate. Before Mikhail Gorbachev cut Soviet losses by ratifying a precarious peace in 1988, the Soviet Union was maintaining between 100,000 and 120,000 of its own troops in Afghanistan as well as subsidizing unreliable Afghan forces without advancing against the enemies of its puppet regime.

Within the Soviet Union, the Afghan nightmare, a general economic slowdown, and rising international publicity for Soviet dissidents strengthened the case of would-be reformers in the party hierarchy. In 1985, liberalizer Gorbachev arrived at the party's head with a program of opening up public life: releasing political prisoners, accelerating exit visas for Jews, shrinking the military, reducing external military involvement, and ending violent repression of demands for political, ethnic, and religious autonomy. By 1987, he was promoting *perestroika*, a shift of the economy from military to civilian production, toward better and more abundant consumer goods, and in the direction of much higher productivity. In parallel, Gorbachev announced that the Soviet Union would no longer provide military support to Central European satellite regimes that came under attack from their own citizens.

Reduction of central controls over production and distribution promoted:

- Proliferation of small enterprises.
- Widespread attempts to set up joint ventures with foreign capitalists.
- More open operation of the black markets, gray markets, and mutual aid networks that had long linked individuals, households, and firms.
- Massive slowdowns of payments and goods deliveries to central organizations.
- Substitution of private media and systems of exchange for public means.
- Extensive diversion of government-owned stocks and facilities into profit-making or monopoly-maintaining private distribution networks to the benefit of existing managers, quick-thinking entrepreneurs, and members of organizations already enjoying preferential access to desirable goods, facilities, or foreign currencies.

All this happened as the government was attempting, on the contrary, to generalize and liberate national markets. As a consequence, the capacity of the central state to deliver rewards to its followers declined visibly from one month to the next. In response, officials and managers engaged in what Steven Solnick calls a run on the bank: wherever they could divert fungible assets to their own advantage, they increasingly did so. They set about "stealing the state" (Solnick, 1998).

On the political front, a parallel and interdependent collapse of central authority occurred.

As results of Gorbachev's economic program alienated not only producers who previously had benefited from emphasis on military enterprise, but also consumers who did not have ready access to one of the new distribution networks and officials whose previous powers were now under attack, his political program opened up space for critics and rivals such as Boris Yeltsin. From a Moscow base, Yeltsin rose to control the Russian federation. Gorbachev's own effort to check the threatened but still intact military and intelligence establishments through conciliation, caution, and equivocation encouraged defections of reformers without gaining him solid conservative support. Simultaneously, furthermore, he sought to acquire emergency powers that would free him to forward economic transformation. That brought him into conflict with rival reformers, political libertarians and defenders of the old regime alike. Although demands for guarantees of religious and political liberties arose almost immediately in 1986 and 1987, nevertheless, the rush of nationalities to assure their positions in relation to the emerging new political system destroyed the old regime.

Russia's Communists, after all, had dealt with non-Russian regions by co-opting regional leaders who were loyal to their cause, integrating them into the Communist party, recruiting their successors among the most promising members of designated nationalities but training them in Russia, dispatching many Russians to staff new industries, professions, and administrations, promoting Russian language and culture as media of administration and interregional communication, granting regional power holders substantial autonomy and military support within their own territories just so long as they assured supplies of state revenue, goods, and conscripts, striking immediately against any individual or group that called for liberties outside of this system. Such a system could operate effectively so long as regional leaders received powerful support from the center and their local rivals had no means or hope of appealing for popular backing.

The system's strength also proved to be its downfall. Gorbachev and collaborators simultaneously promoted opening of political discussion, reduced military involvement in political control, tolerated alternatives to the Communist connecting structure, made gestures toward truly contested elections, and acknowledged diminished capacity to reward faithful followers. As that happened, both regional power holders and their rivals suddenly acquired strong incentives to distance themselves from the center, to recruit popular support, to establish their credentials as authentic representatives of the local people, to urge priority of their own nationalities within territorial subdivisions of the USSR they happened to occupy, and to press for new forms of autonomy. In the Baltic republics and those along the USSR's western or southern tiers, furthermore, the possibility of special relations with kindred states and authorities outside the Soviet Union—Sweden, Finland, Turkey, Iran, the European Community, and NATO—offered political leverage and economic opportunity the Union itself was decreasingly capable of providing.

In political subdivisions containing more than one well-organized national population, threats mounted rapidly to those who lost the competition for certification as authentic regional citizens. Those who moved first could gain more. Escalation began, with each concession by the central government giving new incentives and precedents for further demands by other nationalities, increasingly threatening any connected population that shared a distinct identity but failed to mobilize effectively. As early as 1986, demands for autonomy and protection arose not only from Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, and Ukrainians, but also from Kazakhs, Crimean Tatars, Armenians, Moldavians, Uzbeks, and Russians themselves. Within such heterogeneous regions as Nagorno-Karabakh, a primarily Armenian enclave within Azerbaijan, militants of neighboring ethnicities battled for priority and did not scruple to kill. In addition to Azerbaijan, Moldavia, Georgia, and Tadjikistan grew mean with intergroup con-

flict. Between January 1988 and August 1989, ethnic clashes claimed 292 lives, leaving 5520 people injured and 360,000 homeless (Nahaylo & Swoboda, 1990, p. 336). The situation recalled the Empire's disaggregation in 1918.

Time horizons altered rapidly. On the large scale and the small, people could no longer count on payoffs from long-term investment in the existing system; they reoriented to short-term gains and exit strategies. Gorbachev's 1990 proposal of a new union treaty, with greater scope for the 15 republics but preservation of a federal government's military, diplomatic, and economic priority, simply accelerated the efforts of each potential national actor to assure its own position within (or, for that matter, just outside) the new system. When Gorbachev sought validation of his plans in a referendum of March 1991, leaders of six republics (Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Moldavia, Armenia, and Georgia, all of which had started the process of declaring themselves independent) boycotted the proceedings, as results for the rest confirmed the division between Russia and the non-Russian portions of the tottering federation. From outside, venture capitalists, development economists, world financial institutions, and great powers such as the United States, Turkey, Iran, and the European Union all strove for their pieces of the action and/or for containment of ugly spillover from Soviet turmoil.

In the face of ethnic disaggregation, economic collapse, and undermining of the old regime's powers, many observers and participants on the Soviet scene feared a bid of the military, intelligence, and Party establishment to reverse the flow of events. History realized their fears. The critical moment arrived in August 1991, when a junta backed by just those elements sequestered Gorbachev at his Crimean holiday retreat on the eve of his signing yet another union treaty for the nine republics that were still collaborating with the central state. Drawn especially from the military, intelligence, and police administrations, plotters declared the seizure of power by a shadowy emergency committee; its control of the state, such as it was, lasted only 3 days.

President Boris Yeltsin of the Russian federation had already been playing the nationalist card against central authority on behalf of Russia. During the abortive coup, Yeltsin braved the army's tanks and spoke to crowds in Moscow, calling for a general strike against the emergency committee. Several military units defected to Yeltsin's side, setting up a defensive line around the Russian republic's Moscow headquarters. The defection and defense shattered the junta's resolve. The attempted coup broke up without armed combat. Gorbachev's captors released him.

On his return, Gorbachev faced a wave of demands for accelerated reform, renewed efforts of organized nationalities to depart from the Union, intensified rivalries from Yeltsin and his counterparts in other republics, and utter collapse of the Kremlin's authority. Resigning as Party head, Gorbachev suspended Party activities throughout the USSR. Over the next 4 months Yeltsin sought to succeed Gorbachev, not as Party secretary but as chief of a confederation maintaining a measure of economic, military, and diplomatic authority. Even that effort ended with dissolution of the Soviet Union into an ill-defined and disputatious Commonwealth from which the Baltic states absented themselves entirely, while others began rushing toward exits.

Once the Soviet regime collapsed, Russian nationalists (including the opportunistic nationalist Yeltsin) faced a fierce dilemma: on the one hand, they claimed the right of Russians to rule the Russian federation, which actually included millions of people from non-Russian minorities. This claim supported the principle that titular nationalities should prevail. On the other hand, they vigorously criticized the treatment of Russians outside the Russian federation—for example, the large numbers of self-identified Russians in Estonia, Lithuania, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan—as second-class minorities facing a choice among assimilation to the titular

nationality, lesser forms of citizenship, and emigration (Barrington, 1995). Unsurprisingly, newly independent neighbors often accused the Russian federation's authorities of imperialism.

Mark Beissinger's catalog of protest events from 1987 through 1992 throughout the Soviet Union's space identifies a crucial shift in popular participation. Protest demonstrations increased rapidly in numbers from 1987 to 1989, then reached their peak in 1990, only to swing wildly but in a generally downward direction thereafter. Mass violent events, in contrast, reached a minor peak in mid-1989, but began a powerful upward surge in 1991, remaining frequent through 1992; by 1992, the dominant issue of protest events had become the drawing of borders among republics (Beissinger, 1998, pp. 294–305). The shift corresponded to a switch from relatively peaceful, if massive, demands for reform and national representation to bitterly fought struggles over national rights. State-seeking nationalism (on the part of republics seeking exit from the Union) and state-led nationalism (on the part of republic leaders seeking to establish hegemony within their own territories) interacted powerfully.

As it happens, Beissinger explicitly interprets his events as a cycle of contention, with violence characteristically increasing in the cycle's later stages. Indeed, all four of our mechanisms—opportunity spirals, identity shift, competition, and brokerage—operated with a vengeance in Soviet disintegration. In the Soviet case, several spirals succeeded each other: first bids for external support of profit-making and rent-seeking enterprises under declining central controls, then outright assertions of rights to national autonomy on the parts of existing regional leaders and their local rivals, and finally seizure of fungible state resources by whomever could make off with them. Considering previous images of the Communist system as an unshakable block, identity shift occurred with startling rapidity, with longtime beneficiaries of Communist control backing off from identification with the party and its legacy in favor of a series of improvised alternatives among which ethnic labels (including Russian) assumed ever-increasing scope. Competition operated on two fronts: in attempts to gain external economic and political support; in related attempts to seize organizations and assets previously firmly under state control.

Brokerage may be less obvious, but it made a big difference in two regards. First, it helps account for the remarkable continuity of rulers through apparently revolutionary turmoil. Although gangsters and tycoons have appeared from the shadows of Soviet society, for the most part the people who run things in the former Soviet Union are the same sorts of people—and in many cases the very same people—who ran things during the 1980s. That is because as connectors in a vast centralized system they had privileged access to information, resources, and other centers of power; it was extremely difficult for anyone to match the advantages afforded them by their institutional positions. The second regard is the converse of the first: once regional leaders, entrepreneurs, work groups, and ordinary citizens started to resist yielding goods and services to central authorities, those authorities lost power as brokers; they could no longer redistribute resources to sustain their own positions, their allies, and the activities to which they were most committed. Thus opportunity spirals, identity shifts, competition, and brokerage interacted powerfully.

Notice the crucial importance of history in the actual operation of these mechanisms. Two examples only: First, given the USSR's vast, powerful military establishment, one might have expected the Soviet military to play a pivotal independent role in the transition from socialism. Despite the involvement of military, intelligence, and police officers in the 1991 coup, the military establishment figured only secondarily in the events we have reviewed. The historical creation of a massive governing party out of a fusion of revolutionary activism with military mobilization left the Soviet Union's military impressively subordinated to civilian power holders. (In fact, the military probably wield more autonomous political power in postsocialist

Russia and other fragments of the Union than they did during the 1980s.) Brokerage operated within limits set by previously established organizational relations.

Second, the Stalinist system of rule through titular nationalities had a double effect. In previously independent countries the USSR had incorporated wholesale—notably the Baltic states—even the massive diffusion of Russian-language communication and the substantial migration of ethnic Russian technicians and administrators did not destroy recognized non-Russian political identities. In multicultural, multilingual regions, the establishment of titular nationalities created recognized, dominant political identities where none had previously prevailed. As a consequence, political identities the regime had nurtured (rather than age-old solidarities and hatreds) became the bases of mobilization, opposition, and political reconstitution as the Soviet Union disintegrated. Opportunity spirals, identity shifts, and competition worked in the USSR as they do elsewhere, but as they incorporated and articulated with distinctive historical accumulations they led to rather different outcomes than, say, in the disbanding of the tsarist, Ottoman, or British empires. In this sense, time and place made a huge difference to the operation of very general political processes.

PUZZLING FEATURES IN CLASSES OF EPISODES

Our third strategy is to identify puzzling features for a whole class of similar episodes, then use systematic comparison with other classes of episodes to locate robust mechanisms and processes producing those puzzling features. Social movements offer an excellent illustration. Whatever else happens in social movements, they center on projection of collective identities. For clarity and compactness, my discussion will concentrate on identity mechanisms and processes within social movements, neglecting their connections with social change, organizational bases, responses to threat and opportunity, forms of action, and strategic interactions (see Tarrow, 1998, for extensive discussions of these matters). It also will interweave comparisons with other classes of episodes instead of setting out those comparisons separately.

Although some analysts use the term "social movement" loosely for any sort of collective popular claim making, both the term and the phenomenon crystallized during the 19th century. The social movement consists of sustained interaction between power holders and activists who speak on behalf of a wronged population through collective public displays of determination and capacity coupled with explicit support for programs of action. At least as concretized in associations, public meetings, demonstrations, marches, petitions, slogans, writings, and statements to the media, no social movements occurred anywhere in the world before the late 18th century. Yet by 1850, social movement activity had become a well-established mode of political action in Western Europe and North America. By the end of the 20th century, the social movement had become a standard form of politics throughout the democratic world.

Oddly, no one has yet written a comprehensive history of this significant political innovation. From more fragmentary studies, nevertheless, some features of the social movement's history emerge: significant coincidence with the expansion of popular elections and parliamentary power; reliance on freedom of association and speech; early salience of labor and religious organizations, followed by proliferation of other special interests; overlap with the growth of interest group politics; displacement of relatively direct, and frequently violent, forms of claim making, by predominantly nonviolent shows of strength; interdependence with

the formation of police forces specialized in control of public spaces; significant cross-national transfers of practices and personnel; and internal historical development in prevailing idioms, practices, and organizational structures. Like election campaigns and strikes, social movements have a well-defined political history.

They also present a puzzling feature that has generated plenty of debate but no resolution: Why do social movement participants spend so much of their shared time and organizing effort on public displays of solidarity when they could be engaging in interactions that in the short run are more likely to advance the programs they advocate? Opponents of particular social movements often have asked the question in a hostile mood, wondering out loud why young people waste their effort in disruptive marching and shouting when their elders are quietly doing their best to solve the problems about which the youngsters are complaining. Activists themselves often have split over the choice between concrete ameliorative efforts and contentious public displays of solidarity. Even generally enthusiastic participants ask themselves now and then whether meeting, demonstrating, and chanting slogans have any impact on the evils they seek to combat.

Many observers have thought that solidarity and shared identity bring intrinsic satisfaction, but that explanation ignores both (1) the many occasions on which identity displays offer little more than suffering to the participants, and (2) the effort that leaders invest in coordinating correct public performances in support of claimed identities. Some professional students of social movements have replied to the dilemma by rejecting instrumental accounts, at least for the new social movements of environmentalism, feminism, peace, and sexual preference. Social movements, they say, organize not around practical politics but around the production of new identities.

That critique almost gets things right. Yet it locates the identities in question wrongly. Political identities always erect boundaries between political actors, define relations across the boundaries, and organize relations on either side of the boundaries as well. The crucial mechanisms include those that Soviet experience has already brought to our attention: opportunity spirals, identity shift, competition, and brokerage. But they also include category formation and object shift.

Category formation creates identities. A social category consists of a set of sites that share a boundary distinguishing all of them from and relating all of them to at least one set of sites visibly excluded by the boundary. Category formation occurs by means of three different submechanisms, through invention, borrowing, and encounter. Invention involves authoritative drawing of a boundary and prescription of relations across that boundary, as when Bosnian Serb leaders decree who in Bosnia is a Serb and who not, then regulate how Serbs interact with non-Serbs. Borrowing involves importation of a boundary-cum-relations package already existing elsewhere and its installation in the local setting, as when rural French Revolutionaries divided along the lines patriot/aristocrat that had already split Paris and other major French cities.

Encounter involves initial contact between previously separate (but internally well-connected) networks in the course of which members of one network begin competing for resources with members of the other, interactively generating definitions of the boundary and relations across it. In social movements, invention, borrowing, and encounter all occur, but social movements specialize in combinations of invention and borrowing: creation of the Coalition of *X*s, United Citizens of *Y*, Front against *Z*, each of them paired with some set of authorities.

Object shift significantly affects contentious repertoires. Object shift means alteration in relations between claimants and objects of claims. Object shift often occurs in the short run

during the strategic interaction of contention; battling gangs unite against the police, the intervention of an official in a market conflict diverts customers' attacks to him, a besieged tax clerk calls in the mayor. Of course, such shifts commonly alter the actors and the paired identities they deploy, but they likewise affect the forms of collective claim making that are available, appropriate, and likely to be effective. Object shift also occurs over the longer run and outside of contentious interaction. Social movements often involve object shift, as activists move among claims on local authorities, claims on national authorities, competition with rivals, and provision of services to their constituencies.

As we saw in the earlier discussion of certification and decertification, over a wide variety of polities recognition as a valid political actor provides collective benefits distinct from accomplishment of the particular programs around which people rally. Because certification matters, important elements of contentious politics that a strict means–end calculus renders mysterious actually make sense. To make a successful claim of collective worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment brings recognition as a credible political player with the capacity to make a difference in the next political struggle.

To be sure, individual commitment and interpersonal bonds matter crucially to the collective life of any social movement. What is more, some people do experience intensive satisfaction and establish lifelong ties in social movement activism. Social movement involvement often alters people's own relations to others as well as their sense of who they are. But identity has a public, collective side that does not depend heavily on person-by-person transformation.

On the public side of social movement activity, what are the stakes? Recognition as a valid political actor makes those who represent the collective identity available as allies, carries the implicit threat of independent or disruptive action, and solidifies communication lines both within and across boundaries. In fact, those benefits are sufficiently substantial that, as Robert Michels noted long ago, leaders of recognized political actors often shift into advancing their own interests by means of the organizations and connections they control.

A social movement is a kind of campaign, parallel in many respects to an electoral campaign. This sort of campaign, however, demands righting of a wrong, most often a wrong suffered by a well-specified population. It constructs that population as a category, often as a categorical candidate for polity membership. The population in question can range from a single individual to all humans, or even all living creatures. Whereas an electoral campaign pays off chiefly in the votes that finally result from it, a social movement pays off in effective transmission of the message that its program's supporters are WUNC: (1) worthy, (2) unified, (3) numerous, and (4) committed. The four elements compensate one another to some degree, for example, with a high value on worthiness making up for small numbers. Yet a visibly low value on any one of them (a public demonstration of unworthiness, division, dwindling numbers, and/or outright defection) discredits the whole movement.

Social movement campaigning involves a familiar bundle of performances: creation of associations and coalitions, marches, demonstrations, petitions, public meetings, slogan-shouting, badge-wearing, pamphlet-writing, and more. Seen as means–end action, such a campaign has a peculiar diffuseness; as compared with striking, voting, smashing the loom of a nonstriking weaver, or running a miscreant out of town, its actions remain essentially symbolic, cumulative, and indirect, with almost no chance that any single event will achieve its stated objective of ending an injustice or persuading authorities to enact a needed law. Social movement mobilization gains its strength from an implicit threat to act in adjacent arenas: to withdraw support from public authorities, to provide sustenance to a regime's enemies, to ally with splinter parties, to move toward direct action or even rebellion. Skilled

social movement organizers draw tacitly on such threats to bargain with the objects of their demands.

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

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

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

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

Movements differ significantly in the relative attention they give to these various audiences, from self-absorbed tests of daring organized by small clusters of terrorists to signature of petitions by transient participants who wish some authority to know their opinion. These orientations frequently vary in the course of a given social movement, for example, in transitions from (1) internal building to (2) ostentatious action to (3) fighting off competitors and enemies.

Mystification does not mean utter falsehood. Activists and constituents of social movements vary considerably in the extent to which they actually embody worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment, in the degree to which they spring from a single solidary group with collective life outside the world of public politics. To the extent that the two varieties of mystification contain elements of truth, furthermore, social movements generally mobilize more effectively. A segregated ethnic community threatened by outside attack, on the average, mobilizes more readily than does the entire category consisting of all those who suffer from diverse attacks on civil liberties.

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

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

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

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

As they developed in Great Britain and other West European countries during the early 19th century, characteristic social movement displays included creation of special purpose associations, lobbying of officials, public meetings, demonstrations, marches, petitions, pamphlets, statements in mass media, posting or wearing of identifying signs, and deliberate adoption of distinctive slogans; while their relative weight varied considerably from movement to movement, these elements have coexisted since the early 19th century.

Note the importance of invention. For all its contentiousness, most of human history has proceeded without social movements, without sustained challenges to power holders in the names of populations living under the jurisdiction of those power holders by means of repeated public displays of those populations' numbers, commitment, unity, and worthiness. Rebellions, revolutions, avenging actions, rough justice, and many other forms of popular collective action have abounded, but not the associating, meeting, marching, petitioning, propagandizing, sloganeering, and brandishing of symbols that mark social movements.

With some 18th-century precedents, this complex of interactions emerge as a way of doing political business in Western Europe and North America during the 19th century; however we finally sort out the priorities, Britain shares credit for the invention. In Great Britain, the actual inventors were political entrepreneurs such as John Wilkes, Lord George Gordon, William Cobbett, and Francis Place. They, their collaborators, and their followers bargained out space for new forms of political action; bargained it out with local and national authorities, with rivals, with enemies, and with objects of their claims.

Social movements, then, center on construction of categorical identities. Identities in general are shared experiences of distinctive social relations and representations of those social relations. Workers become workers in relation to employers and other workers, women become women in relation to men and other women, Orthodox Jews become Orthodox Jews in relation to non-Jews, non-Orthodox Jews, and other Orthodox Jews.

Like social movements, nationalism and religious qualifications for citizenship involve the construction and enforcement of unequal paired categories. Clearly the study of identities in social movements leads directly to comparisons with identity mechanisms and processes in quite different classes of episodes.

ANALOGIES AMONG OSTENSIBLY DISSIMILAR EPISODES

The fourth analytical strategy for historical treatment of political processes consists of identifying partial causal analogies among ostensibly dissimilar episodes and classes of episodes by locating the same mechanisms and processes within them. In fact, we have been pursuing that analytical strategy through the three previous examples. Consider the major causal mechanisms we have encountered along the way: certification, decertification, identity shift, object shift, opportunity spirals, competition, and brokerage. They constitute a small but widely applicable bundle of identity-shaping mechanisms. They certainly appear recurrently in episodes of nationalism, imperial disintegration, and social movements. They reappear, however, in unexpected places: in civil wars when each party claims to be the authentic embodiment of the rightful government, in revolutions when insurgents claim to speak for the oppressed, in state formation when one authority among many manages to eliminate or subordinate the rest, in democratization when previously excluded political actors acquire voice. Across a wide range of political processes, certification, decertification, identity shift, object shift, opportunity spirals, competition, and brokerage operate in similar fashions, with vastly dissimilar overall consequences.

Let me stress that conclusion. The mechanism-based program of inquiry into historical political processes does not return surreptitiously to the discovery of recurrent structures and processes on the large scale. It denies the possibility of general models and complete explanations for whole political episodes. It also negates the idea that war, revolution, social movements, nationalism, and democratization constitute phenomena *sui generis*, each springing in its own characteristic way from a distinctive set of causes. It concedes that as political constructions one war influences the next, one revolution influences the next, and so on. But that construction of politically meaningful forms and its consequences for political action become part of what historical analysts must explain.

Sociologists who take this program of inquiry seriously will have to abandon ingrained practices: creating *sui generis* models of major political processes, choosing among covering law, propensity, and system accounts of explanation; imagining history as a storage bin of raw materials for testing of contemporary political models; rejecting explanations because they neglect favorite variables; and supposing that exhaustion of variance is the criterion of solid explanation. Those who dare have a world to gain.

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