



Retrieved from: <http://www.cifas.us/smith/chapters.html>

Title: "Conditions of change in social stratification."

Author(s): M.G. Smith

Source: In *Evolution of Social Systems*. J. Friedman and M. J. Rowlands, eds. London: George Duckworth.p. 29-48

"*The Evolution of Social Systems*"

edited by

J. FRIEDMAN and
M.J. ROWLANDS

Proceedings of a meeting of the
[Research Seminar in Archaeology and Related Subjects (5th: 1977:
held at the Institute of Archaeology, London University
London University)

University of Pittsburgh Press

M.G. SMITH

Conditions of change in social stratification

Social stratification is present wherever an objectively differential distribution of life chances and situations obtains among categories or groups of persons ranked as superior and inferior within the social aggregate. Where present, such stratification normally encompasses the total society, and accordingly subsumes a multitude of diverse features, conditions and processes of social organisation in some more or less integrated and inclusive structure or structures which observers and actors alike regard as 'real' and for which they devise models to apprehend and interpret the facts. In the nature of the case, such models can rarely represent exactly the facts with which they deal, since these are multi-dimensional and situational, and obscurely related. Moreover, social stratification is both a state of affairs, a process of ordering relations, a condition of that and other social processes, and the product of many social processes, factors and relations which differ greatly in their particulars and significance for the stratification as a whole. For these reasons I cannot follow those scholars who conceptualise stratification as a system, since these conceptions imply a precise knowledge of the components and relations within the system. Moreover, no single system model, however generalised, can be equally valid for all differing forms of stratification; nor is it likely that a given model will be equally appropriate for a particular stratification at different moments in time. With these reservations, I shall treat stratifications as structures or orders whose conditions and properties are imperfectly known, especially as regards their dynamics and foundations. Accordingly, to grasp the conditions of change in social stratification we need first to understand their nature and foundations.

Stratified distributions of differential life chances entail corresponding differences in the life situations and life cycles typical of the ranked strata, and commonly in their modal life spans as well. Such stratified differences of life chances indicate the differential distributions of opportunities, advantages, sanctions and resources of all kinds, material, cultural, social and other, relevant to the stratification. In stratified societies these relevant variables commonly

include location, sex, age, occupation and income, education, political and legal status, wealth and descent. In societies that are ethnically or radically heterogeneous, ethnicity and race are normally relevant and frequently critical for the stratification. Nonetheless, though many scholars study ethnic stratification, race relations, occupational and economic stratification, and although much has been written about ruling classes and elites, we have relatively few studies of social stratification as politically ordered structure, and fewer that examine the place of location, age and sex in empirical stratifications. While each of these deficiencies may have a different base, they both reflect the 'Westocentric' biases of stratification studies.

Like sociology and much else, the study of social stratification is a product of modern western societies, the fruit of a specific period in which the rigid, politically regulated strata of these societies eroded rapidly as the rate and scale of social (vertical) and geographical mobility increased, within as well as between generations. Partly for these reasons, Marx, who though by no means the first was by far the most influential early student of social stratification, oriented his studies towards their economic aspect and defined classes as strata in terms of their relations with the mode of production. Marx also argued in various places that these economic relations were the foci and motive forces of the social and political order. He thus directed those who shared or opposed his views to consider social stratification in its relation to the economic order of society; and following Marx, many sociologists have regarded the economic order as the primary condition of social stratification.

I believe that this is a serious error for which Marx is responsible. On leaving Germany for Paris and finally London, Marx also broke with his early philosophical self and determined to master and relativise the theory of classical economics. He thus unwittingly dedicated himself to an economic view of society, albeit one which corrected the 'errors' of classical economics by situating economies fully and firmly in their social matrices.¹ Yet even to pursue these aims, Marx had first to view the world of societies in terms of economic relations and categories. He was thus predisposed to recognise and delineate social categories as classes by reference to their economic roles, and never fully escaped from this perspective. However, those differing relations to the mode of production by which Marx distinguished classes had already been determined and institutionalised for these strata by their differing relations to the political order; while some strata ruled, others were ruled; and of the rulers, some were dominant by virtue of various conditions, including descent, while others, including most of the enfranchised bourgeoisie of Marx's day, had at best secondary or tertiary roles in selecting or electing, with restricted choices, some of those who were already eligible to compete for the power to rule. Of the ruled, among whom the rulers promoted useful distinctions, some had various

means and degrees of influence over others in various contexts, while most probably had little or none. The latter were thus fully disenfranchised, formally and substantively, while the former, even though formally disenfranchised, had some substantive power. Marx, given his economic predilections, distinguished and identified these politically differentiated strata solely in economic terms as categories distinguished by their relations with the prevailing mode of production. The ruling strata, that is the rulers and their auxiliaries, he curiously labelled the 'bourgeoisie', although these rulers throughout the nineteenth century were mainly nobles and landed gentry.² Bourgeois who, although enfranchised, were ineligible to compete for high office, were treated as 'intermediate strata' and sometimes referred to as professionals and 'petit bourgeois'. Politically disenfranchised strata were likewise classified by him as petit bourgeois, proletarians and peasants. It appears then that Marx employed two significantly different conceptions of classes, one which distinguished 'wage labourers, capitalists and land owners' as 'three big classes of modern society based upon the capitalist mode of production'³ while the second discriminated various intermediate strata relevant for the discussion of concrete historical situations such as Louis Napoleon's seizure of power in 1848.⁴ While Marxists would disagree, the unresolved differences of these conceptual schemes suggest that Marx, despite his economic bias, hovered between an economic and a political definition of classes and other ranked categories of social stratification; and it is clear that the economic strata identified by Marx were politically instituted, distinguished and ordered by explicitly political means for political ends and in political terms, for example by reference to the franchise. Nonetheless, in supporting, applying, amending or rebutting Marx's hypotheses, subsequent writers on social stratification have perhaps inevitably and unwittingly treated the subject in explicitly economic terms, despite the influential work of Max Weber.

To refine and supplement Marx's monofactorial classification, Weber distinguished classes, status groups and parties as strata based respectively on objective criteria of market position, association, prestige and style of life, and on relative power.⁵ He stressed that the nature and concordance of these scales were problems for empirical investigation in any society. Nonetheless, conservative sociologists who adopted Weber's ideas obscured the nature of social stratification for several years by defining this solely in terms of prestige, as relative evaluation of social roles or units on some collective scale of worth. Talcott Parsons, Kingsley Davis, Wilbert Moore and other 'structural-functionalists' or 'action-theorists' were especially prominent in promoting and expounding this diversion of interest from objective distributions of differential life changes to subjective distributions of differential prestige, and described such disembodied abstractions as occupational roles.⁶ Meanwhile other

students who followed Weber and Marx distinguished caste, slavery, estates and 'classes' as significantly different units and structures of stratification. Some, especially the structural-functionalists, proclaimed on implausible theoretical grounds that stratification was a necessary and universal feature of human societies, even in the absence of ranked social strata.⁷ Gradually, however, it has been accepted that stratification, however important and prevalent, is neither necessary nor universal in human societies, and that many societies in which ranking obtains lack social strata, while others with varied types of social differentiation may lack ranking and stratification together. Normally societies of the latter type are acephalous, weakly differentiated in their economies and technologically poor, while those that institutionalise rank without stratification have better developed technologies and diversified economic and social organisations.⁸

It is not within the scope of this paper to discuss unstratified societies, nor even those that emphasise rank but lack social strata. Instead we are here concerned only with the dynamics of evident stratifications, that is with changes in the stratification of those societies already divided in ranked strata which are characterised by differential life situations and chances of their members. By dynamics here I understand three distinct but closely related processes: (i) Processes of development and institutionalisation of distinct positions, roles and relations within a social order; (ii) Processes of differential allocation of these positions and roles within the stratified population; and (iii) Processes by which a given stratified distribution of positions and roles are maintained or modified. It is convenient to review briefly some of these processes in order to identify their necessary and sufficient conditions, and thereby hopefully to isolate the foundations of social stratification.

Over the past two centuries social scientists have increasingly identified the differentiated role structures of modern societies with their divisions of labour and, despite the work of Millar, Ferguson, Spencer and Durkheim among others,⁹ these divisions of labour have been increasingly treated as social structures generated and patterned by techno-economic and demographic forces. For many writers the division of labour is indeed the primary and formative structure of social stratification, to which all others, such as kinship or law, are secondary.¹⁰ In consequence, many sociologists virtually identify stratification with the prevailing prestige scale of occupations and equate social with occupational mobility.¹¹ However, such conceptions are tenable only if it can be shown that occupational hierarchies always emerge, crystallise, develop and modify or transform themselves autonomously, or in direct response to 'demo-techno-economic' pressures,¹² of their own gestation. Should these occupational structures be thus auto-productive and self-determining, such stratifications as they entail or illustrate would indeed

correspond closely with that of the society as a whole and so demonstrate the primacy of the occupational order. However, this is clearly not the case. As Ferguson and Millar both stressed, the antecedent 'differentiation of ranks' conditions the development of differentiated occupational roles and their allocations within societies. Slaves recruited by purchase, capture, birth or by other means are commonly employed in servile work and heavy labour or in roles requiring special qualities of confidentiality and skill for which eunuchs are often preferred. Serfs, likewise, held their typical occupations by virtue of their political and legal status. Even in India, although Hinduism defines its caste components occupationally and otherwise, as the number of these castes greatly exceeded the number of distinctive occupations in Indian society, while members of the same caste often practised different occupations, members of many different castes sometimes practised the same occupation without undergoing any changes in social status. In practise the apparent autonomy of techno-economic conditions to proliferate new occupations and to modify the occupational structure is a relatively recent phenomenon which correlates with the development of industrial societies in the West; but western sociologists, having chosen to ignore the specificity of these industrial developments and structures on the one hand, and their political and legal preconditions and correlates on the other, have abstracted some of their features for extrapolation as a general theory and evolutionary model of the forms and processes of stratification valid for all societies. Yet even Durkheim was obliged to admit the decisive influence of political factors in directing the development of functional specialisation from its earliest stage up to the anomic phase of late Victorian Europe.¹³ Certainly for pre-industrial societies at all developmental levels, as reflected in the differentiation of their occupational role systems, we have abundant evidence that such occupational differentiations were guided, promoted, repressed or otherwise regulated by political means, that is by exercises of juridical authority and power, as illustrated, for example, by the prohibitions on interest in medieval Catholicism and Islam, the occupational specialisations of medieval Jewry, of merchants and craftsmen, by the restrictions on production, commerce and banking that distinguished Mercantilism, the divisions of labour in imperial China, ancient Athens and Rome, and other instances too numerous to list.

The reduction of such political repression and direction of the occupational order which proceeded in western Europe from the fourteenth century at accelerating pace, and thus permitted progressively autonomous growth of the division of labour, was equally political in its source and character and decisive for the radical development of European science, technology and economy on which elaboration of the occupational structures rested. Unfortunately these political developments have been so much taken

for granted by social scientists that their significance is overlooked, perhaps because scholars have been preoccupied rather with the validity of Marxist theses and Weber's alternatives in tracing the genesis of modern capitalism. However no one disputes the centrality of the three successive political revolutions, that of the Puritans in seventeenth-century Britain, of the American colonists in 1776 and of the French in 1789, in destroying the political-juridical structures that had hitherto enchaind and subordinated to a stratification essentially anchored in estate feudalism, those burgeoning techno-economic forces and interests that have since precipitated the modern occupational order of industrial societies. To detail the principal political and legal developments which made possible this great transformation is patently inappropriate here, nor is that necessary, since we can demonstrate elliptically the decisive role of these political conditions in establishing the central pre-requisites for modern industrial capitalism simply by scrutinising Max Weber's list of eight features or conditions necessary to constitute modern industrial capitalism as a pure type.

These are, respectively:

1. 'The complete appropriation of all the non-human means of production by owners, and the complete absence of all formal appropriation of opportunities of profit in the market; that is, market freedom' – a juridical condition which obviously requires political action and which inspired all three revolutions mentioned above.
2. 'Complete autonomy in the selection of management by the owners, thus absence of formal appropriation of rights to managerial functions', another condition that presupposes political dissolution and abolition of those managerial arrangements and models typical of feudalism in the manor and the towns, and of the colonial regime in the American states.
3. 'The complete absence of the appropriation of jobs and of opportunities for earning by workers, and, conversely, absence of appropriation of workers by owners. This involves free labour, freedom of the labour market, and freedom in the selection of workers;' – the political preconditions and processes of such liberalisation from feudal forms of labour control are too obvious and familiar to need attention.
4. 'Complete absence of substantive regulation of consumption, production and prices, or of other forms of regulation which limit freedom of contract or specify conditions of exchange. This may be called substantive freedom of contract.' This is also clearly a juridical condition that assumes the establishment and continued efficacy of requisite political and legal arrangements. To establish such freedom of contract, political action to destroy the feudal restrictions was obviously necessary.

5. 'Maximum of calculability of the technical conditions of the productive process; that is, a mechanically rational technology' – the development of which likewise presupposed and proceeded with the establishment of appropriate political conditions in Protestant countries to free science and technology from ecclesiastical and monarchic controls.
6. 'Complete calculability of the functioning of public administration and the legal order, and the reliable formal guarantee of all contracts by the political authority. This is formally rational administration and law.' This condition assumes the efficient implementation of the doctrines of separation of powers as propounded notably by Locke and by Montesquieu before the British revolution of 1688 and the American revolution of 1776 respectively.
7. 'The most complete possible separation of the enterprise and its conditions of success and failure from the household or private budgetary unit and its property interests.' Though superficially indifferent to juridical facts, as expressed in joint stock limited liability companies or in modern multi-national corporations having similar bases, this condition likewise assumes specific political and juridical arrangements.
8. 'A monetary system with the highest possible degree of formal rationality' – which obviously presupposes a formally rational political administration that regulates currency as one of the routine affairs of a centralised state.¹⁴

Of course, with these eight conditions Weber merely intended to specify the minimal prerequisites of an industrial capitalism characterised by perfect competition and maximum formal rationality in its operations. Such an economy has perhaps rarely if ever existed in any period and place. Yet insofar as various empirical economies depart from this model, they can only be made to approximate it more closely through specific measures of explicitly political and juridical kind. Contemporary South Africa is only the most familiar and striking demonstration in the western world of the combination of regulated labour with an expanding industrial economy; and clearly the restrictions and disabilities of coloured labour in South Africa are politically determined and enforced, even against the rational economic interests of those who dominate the regime.¹⁵ In like fashion, West Indian planters opposed the abolition of slavery by Britain in 1834 although the institution had become increasingly uneconomic since the abolition of the slave trade in 1808.¹⁶ There are, of course, numberless cases in which specifically economic interests have been set aside or overruled by other considerations, normally of a political and social kind, always by explicitly political or juridical means. Clearly also, as history affirms, the institution, maintenance, modification or dissolution of servile stratifications such as slavery,

serfdom, peonage, helotage and characteristically colonial structures, all assume, reflect and proceed by specific applications of political power. Caste in India is singular only in so far as the ritual ranking of categories on the scale of purity and pollution which correlates broadly with the distribution of political power in many areas, provides the medium or object of this distribution, though never its decisive means or base. Accordingly in all major varieties of social stratification, we find that the distribution of power is decisive and central to their form, range and scope. It is thus not surprising that the differential allocations of positions, prestige and roles within a given division of labour should be governed by principles and factors, the validity of which directly or indirectly illustrates political bases and conditions. Neither can a political order persist or develop in flagrant contradiction to the order of social stratification; nor is the reverse conceivable. Accordingly in those regions of India dominated by low-ranking castes, the latter rapidly acquire higher ritual status appropriate to their secular roles. In less elaborately ritualised societies, if the traditional stratification loses its former validity, dynamic strata assert their predominance by political means, and on occasion by violent action. We may therefore ask whether, in any single instance a stable or persisting order of stratification inverts or controverts the distribution of power among the social strata; and I believe that even in India we shall find no exception.

This conclusion may be tested further by detailed study of the processes by which empirical orders of stratification have historically been maintained or modified; but no such examination will be attempted here. The preceding discussion of the three sets of processes that together provide the dynamics of stratification illustrates their necessarily close and constant association with the distribution of power, of which they are simultaneously the product, the object and an important condition. Accordingly, to investigate further the dynamics of stratification, we should examine the relations between different kinds of stratification and distributions of political power.

For clarity, specifically political power is manifested in the regulation of public affairs, that is, the collective affairs, however defined, of a continuing social aggregate organised as a public or corporate group. There are of course many modalities of power and influence besides the explicitly political, for example religious, economic, military, social and industrial power; these and other categories alike refer to activities and relations which are specific to some distinct segment of the collectivity rather than to the inclusive aggregate that forms the public as a unit. Moreover, in so far as such segmentally based power is employed to regulate the public and its affairs, it acquires by this fact an explicitly political character and relevance. However, political power has diverse bases and components, which include individual and collective prestige, ritual, military, economic, technical, intellectual, administrative,

demographic and other resources, and a variety of situationally relevant social capacities and cultural skills including control of communication channels, of relevant organisations, symbolic and ideological structures, capacities for self-discipline, solidarity and much else. The distribution of power that decides which side prevails in any confrontation is thus a situationally specific combination of many variable components. Thus as power is the ability to secure compliance to one's will, and as the situations, subjects and objects of such compliance vary widely in time and place, any individual or group that seeks to regulate a public's affairs has first to mobilise sufficient resources and support to secure its preponderance, and then to establish an effective organisation of these resources to stabilise its rule by controlling most or all of the requisites just listed. Inevitably such efforts to stabilise a favourable distribution of power rarely succeed in full for, as indicated above, power as a product of many labile factors is highly conditional, contingent, and for its stabilisation it therefore requires an appropriate regulation of all relevant conditions which can rarely be achieved as an integrated structure. Such stability also presupposes that the predominant power in question should be accepted as legitimate and authoritative by the public it regulates and by other bodies with whom it deals externally. This assumption of authority is not equally feasible for all politically oriented or dominant groups, as the constitutional norms of public organisation, which themselves enshrine the outcomes of earlier political action, often restrict acceptable solutions. For example, in African chiefdoms, only princes of the ruling house are eligible to succeed; in Melanesia only those who have demonstrated their charisma could become 'big men'. In America the presidency must be won by a direct national election; but in Britain the Prime Ministership reflects electoral results less directly and may pass by other means. Such variable constitutional norms define conditions of eligibility for authoritative positions and establish frameworks within which mobilisations and deployments of power to regulate public affairs normally proceed. Naturally, despite the sanctity that often clothes them, constitutions are frequently the instruments and targets of political action.

While authority is the appropriate mode in which power to regulate a public's affairs is institutionalised as legitimate, without the power necessary to enforce its procedures and rules, authority is ineffective, and those who hold power will regulate the public affairs proportionately in their own interests, as in the various Japanese shogunates. Conversely in certain situations, although the rulers may be able to enforce their orders, and may thus claim to exercise authority, their rule may be regarded as illegitimate or even illegal by the majority they govern, so that empirically their regulation exhibits power without legitimacy. Both alternatives indicate that while authority is the normal and most appropriate medium of public

regulation, and while its forms, organisation and ideology clearly influence the distribution and exercise of power within collectivities, the efficacy and forms of authoritative regulation ultimately depend on the balance of power among the structures that support and oppose it.

In unstratified acephalous societies, authority and power are either diffuse and labile, or are frequently combined as coincident ritual and secular capacities. In some societies lineage heads and patriarchs symbolise and exercise both; in others, while shamans and priests exercise ritual authority, warriors, leaders in men's associations, and other secular figures wield personal power. In many weakly differentiated societies priests or priest-chiefs who uphold and symbolise the authority of collective norms take precedence over war leaders and secular chiefs concerned with mundane administration. Normally these contrasting types of leadership are recruited and exercised by differing means.

Despite its greater scale, complexity and elaborate stratification, Hindu society, which is modally polycephalous, illustrates this pattern in the ritual superiority it accords Brahmans over Kshatriya and other Varna or castes. The resulting social structure is highly flexible, adaptive and resilient; it offers insecure and shifting bases for any extensive indigenous centralised state. By virtue of their ritual pre-eminence and collective immunities, Brahmans personify and hold the ultimate keys of authority, even where Kshatriyas or others dominate; and in those regions governed by Brahmans, their secular dominance is reinforced and overlaid by their ritual status. In consequence at different times and places, India illustrates a variety of unstable political alignments among high-ranking castes whose ritual stratification corresponds variably with the secular order based on prevailing distributions of power and wealth.

The feudal society of western Christendom in medieval Europe offers intriguing parallels and contrasts with this Hindu order. As with Hindu caste rankings of Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya, Sudra, so in the European estate system, clergy claimed precedence over secular nobles, who ranked above the merchants, the freemen and serfs. However, unlike the Brahmans, European clergy were forbidden to marry, and they were also organised and controlled by a powerful central head. Thus, unlike the Brahman caste, the clerical estate in Europe was not self-reproducing and recruited its members from other strata. The centralised monarchic organisation also brought this order into prolonged and direct conflict for supremacy and dominance with secular states; and when the clergy finally lost the struggle in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the road to the Reformation was open, and thereafter, by religious wars and other processes, secularisation and the development of modern society advanced together.

Islamic societies, founded originally by the Prophet as an

indissoluble integration of ritual authority and secular power, illustrate in different ways other variants of this pattern. So does imperial China, through the differing interpretations of the doctrine that rulers, including rebels, usurpers and dowagers, governed by 'the mandate of Heaven'. These and other outcomes of the familiar struggles between ritual and secular authorities in most extensive and complex pre-industrial societies together indicate that the instability and persistence of social structures based on such accommodations depend firstly on the distribution of power among the supporters of these competing institutions, and secondly on their ability to avoid direct mutual confrontations. In medieval Europe the centralisation of secular and ritual authorities, coupled with proscription of marriage for clerics, promoted and encouraged direct struggles that destroyed the basic accommodation on which the estate organisation of feudal society rested. By contrast, the diffuse and flexible fragmented accommodations of Kshatriyas and Brahmans endowed Hinduism and Indian society with a fundamental resilience and adaptivity that secured its perpetuation, while the Chinese imperium owed its security as much to religious divisions of the people among Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism as to the overwhelming concentration of power in Peking.

Such observations enable us to treat these societies together with due attention to their differing stratifications. They likewise justify the attempt to treat them with other societies such as ancient Rome and Athens, Ruanda, Mossi, Uganda or modern metropolitan and colonial societies that lack such ideological bifurcations of authority and power in ritual and secular scales within a single framework, provided we recognise first that, like other forms of subordination, stratification assumes regulation and that regulation combines power, defined as the ability to secure compliance, and authority, identified as the right and responsibility to order certain affairs in particular ways and situations for a given aggregate. It is clear that all forms of stratified societies and all strata within these alike derive and depend upon the evolution of their distributions of regulatory power for their form and development. However, as we have seen, such regulation always combines authority, which may be purely secular, narrowly ritual, or mixed, and political power, which has many modalities, official and unofficial, collective and individual, military, economic, social, religious, etc. Thus where ritual rulers, structures and strata regulate collectivities by virtue of their ritual status and by ritual means, the predominance of ritual authority and power over alternative forms is clear. In other cases we are confronted with predominantly secular modes of regulation, even where, as in Hindu India, in Islam, China and medieval Europe, ritual support and legitimation are necessary to establish the ruler's authority. An essentially similar situation arises in expressly secular modern states which oblige their most powerful leaders to fulfil constitutional norms

in order to legitimise their authority; and it is this identity that allows us to treat all these variably ritualised stratification structures together, as equally dependent on the distribution of regulative power, despite variable bases and composition. As we have seen, even the most heavily ritualised and resilient structure, that of Hindu caste, developed and persists by successive adjustments that adapt its ritual hierarchy to the changing distributions of power in space and time. Accordingly, to penetrate the dynamics of stratification structures, given that their legitimacy corresponds with public recognition of the authority of the ruling groups or strata, we have now to specify the various forms which ruling groups may take, and the essential requisites of their regulation. Clearly, in so far as rulers or social stratifications lack public acceptance as legitimate, their regulative capacities express naked power, that is, power without corresponding moral or religious support. This situation, illustrated by the subservience of Roman and Japanese emperors to their powerful subjects, illustrates once again the role and ultimate primacy of power distributions in structures of public regulation, however heavily embedded these may be in ritual, moral and juridical norms. Accordingly, to determine the conditions of such public regulation, we must examine the basic forms and conditions of the distribution of power.

Public regulation, as already remarked, involves the administration of routine or emergency affairs for a definite collectivity organised as a corporate group, that is, one presumed to be perpetual, which thus has clear rules of closure and recruitment, a unique identity, a determinate membership, a set of common but exclusive affairs, and the organisation, procedures and autonomy required to manage these. Such properties are necessary and sufficient to define in the simplest and most general terms all publics and units involved in their routine positive regulation, such as councils (colleges) and offices.¹⁷ To stabilise the constitutional frameworks for orderly legitimate regulation, such regulatory units and agencies as corporate groups require are normally themselves constituted as corporations and presumed to be perpetual. However, corporate groups in many simple societies lack such differentiated regulatory organs as councils or offices.

In other small-scale societies, corporate groups may be regulated directly by offices and councils embedded in them, with minimal administrative staffs; but in larger aggregates, adequate administrative provisions are needed to enforce orders and rules on those beyond direct reach of the chief and his councillors. An informal but flexible stratification accordingly emerges based on differences of political and juridical status and roles between the chief, the ruling house, officials, his councillors, their staffs, and the commoners who compose the majority of the public. Clearly priests, diviners and ritual experts of various kinds may be included in the ruler's staff and/or

council; and the ruler is often himself primarily a ritual figure. But in so far as these and other official positions on the council and staff are filled by hereditary recruitment from most or all descent groups within the community, as for example among the Yoruba,¹⁸ the distinction between commoners and their rulers will not establish strata, since all lineages will participate in the regulatory structure, albeit in differing ways and times. Only when the stratum of rulers and their assistants is effectively cut off by its modes of recruitment from other parts of the public do we find an evident stratification; and in such situations it is rarely the case that the public consists of two strata only, the rulers and the ruled. Normally each of these strata is further subdivided, as for example, rulers into the dynasty and/or aristocracy of birth on the one hand, their patrimonial staffs, the nobles of office, on the other, and their subjects who may include free native commoners, resident aliens, free people of differing ethnic stock, and unfree persons such as pawns, eunuchs, slaves, serfs and bondsmen. It is evident that the status differences of these various subject strata are political in their institution and juridical in kind; and also that their closure or crystallisation, their elaboration or differentiation, and persistence or dissolution, alike depend upon the effective exercise of political power by those strata privileged to rule. It is also evident, as we pass from aggregates that distribute regulatory roles widely and equally throughout the free elements of their communities to those that do not, that the bases and character of the corporations in which these regulatory functions and powers reside undergo signal change. In the first case, illustrated to a degree by the Ibo, Yoruba and Kikuyu, the public as a whole constitutes the ruling corporate group, even though at any time only some elements of that public may exercise regulatory power. In the latter case, regulatory power and functions vest in a stratum which is characteristically organised as a corporate group which remains pre-occupied with the regulation of collective affairs, including its relations with other strata, whether these be its ritual superiors, as were the Hindu Brahmans or the medieval clergy, or its inferiors in ritual and secular status alike, as is commonly the case.

It is surely significant that these alternative forms of ruling group between them divide the two alternative forms of corporation aggregate, the corporate category and the corporate group, and equally significant that in pre-industrial societies social strata should commonly appear as corporate categories, even within such graded secret societies as the Mende Poro, Yoruba Ogboni or the Efik Ekpe. In East Africa and elsewhere, graded age-sets reproduce this pattern even though they fail to establish valid stratification. In ancient Rome and Athens, patricians constituted strata which were closed equally against the demos, plebs and against clients, bondsmen and slaves. In medieval Europe the strata of nobles, clergy, merchants, free villeins and serfs were likewise closed and ordered categorically; so too in

Japan the orders of *daimyo*, *samurai*, serfs and the caste of *eta*. The categorical status of the ranked Hindu castes has already been noted. In the eighteenth-century Caribbean slave societies a relatively small number of freemen were divided as strata first by colour or race as free coloured, free blacks and whites, and finally within the last category, by political status as those ineligible to vote, those eligible to vote only, and those who could vote and contest elections for the local assembly. Rhodesia and South Africa parallel this pattern today. It is of course instructive to find in the relatively fluid and complex stratifications of industrial societies that folk models assert the corporate nature of social strata, despite overwhelming contrary evidence.

Of course within a ruling stratum such as dominant whites in Caribbean slave societies or Muslims in Muslim conquest states, we commonly find institutional features that distinguish the 'ruling class' or 'political elite' from others of the same broad strata. Rarely shall we find such crisp distinctions as those in the post-bellum South or post-emancipation Caribbean colonies between *petit blancs*, the poor whites, and *grand blancs*, their masters, or those that emphasised ethnicity in ranking, as between Fulani and Hausa in Northern Nigeria or Osmanli Arabs, Asians, Shirazi and mainland Africans in pre-revolutionary Zanzibar. Moreover, even with such subdivided strata, that division which furnishes the ruling group generally consists of one or at most a very small number of competing or co-operating groups which either operate as if they are corporate units, or already hold that status. In such societies, once again power and responsibility to preserve or modify the social stratification reside in the corporate group or stratum that regulates the whole by virtue of its preponderant power.

History shows that despite internal conflicts and struggles for power, certain stratifications last longer than others, are more resilient, and develop or adapt rather than collapse. In such situations as those that followed emancipation in the southern U.S.A., independence in Mauritius and the Caribbean, or the dissolution of feudalism in Britain and France, adaptations and readjustments of the old status structure yielded dissimilar results as equally rational responses to diverse conditions. Such comparisons suggest that to determine the dynamics of stratification in general terms, we should look more closely at those features that distinguish the ruling stratum from others, before considering particulars.

As corporations, ruling strata or those components endowed with regulatory power and responsibilities need first to regulate their relations with other strata and with foreign bodies, that is, to ensure satisfactory *external articulations*. Secondly they have inevitably to regulate all those relations among their members and components which could possibly impair or subvert their collective status and power. These latter I group together as their *internal articulations*. Certain minimally adequate internal and external articulations are

requisite, that is, necessary conditions for the effective regulation of collective relations and affairs by the ruling group. How to determine these minima in any given case will be indicated briefly after other minimal conditions or requisites for the adequate operation of the regulatory structure have been reviewed.

The first of these substantive requisites is adequate *autonomy* – that is freedom and power to actively uphold and pursue the unit's indispensable interests, for without adequate autonomy no social unit can regulate any interest for itself or any other. The second substantive requisite for effective regulation is the necessary *resources*. Resources may be classified as material, i.e. technical, fiscal and other properties; as ideological, that is moral, ritual, cognitive, affectual and symbolic resources, and as social, by which I mean the situationally and individually variable combinations of kin, affines, clients, friends, dependents and others that a social unit may mobilise in times of need. A group may of course possess all the *resources* it needs for self-regulation but lack the *autonomy* to employ them, and vice versa.

The third requisite of any regulative unit is determinate *range*. By a unit's range I mean here the area and/or population for which its regulation is or should be valid and effective at any given instant. Clearly the validity of a regulatory relation may alter territorially or demographically, separately or together, thereby changing the unit's *range*. For example, under Western norms, relations of marriage bind couples absolutely with respect to distance in space but not in time; on the other hand, by conquest or otherwise, a political unit's regulatory authority may expand or contract in area and/or population; and normally, though its boundaries may escape change, the unit's population will normally change over time.

Fourthly, these requisites of range, resources and autonomy alike assume a definite *scope*, that is, a set of affairs and relations which are subject to regulation by a specific unit. It is therefore necessary to define the minimal scope of such regulatory units, irrespective of their bases, form and size, in order to determine the conditions under which regulation and stratification may alter.

A final condition, though not a requisite but an implication or product of the preceding is, like them, an intrinsic attribute of all concrete social units, whether corporate or other. This is the *capacity* or ability of each unit either to regulate its current scope more efficiently, that is with increased effectiveness, precision, speed, etc., or at lower cost with fewer staff; or alternatively, to regulate the same affairs over an expanded range, or to expand its scope and thus to regulate additional affairs efficiently within the given range. Thus the capacity of social units, regulatory or other, derives from their external and internal articulations, their autonomy, resources, scope and range. Capacity, in short, is a derivative implication or product of the preceding properties together, and though an intrinsic attribute of all social units, is not a requisite but an implication.

Clearly while scope and range serve to define precisely the regulatory unit's sphere of operations, resources and autonomy together likewise define its ability to regulate these affairs effectively within the specified range. Likewise, the unit's external and internal articulations, that is, its actual organisation and relations with other units of the same or different kind, and the order it enforces among its members, together define the scope and autonomy at its disposal. Thus these structural conditions of external and internal articulation operatively determine the autonomy and resources the unit enjoys, and thus define its actual and maximal scope, and its capacity, given determinate resources and range.

To specify the minimal scope of regulatory structures of any kind is thus the immediate task; for this known, we can then indicate certain requisite conditions of its autonomy and external articulation. Fortunately, despite their great variety, the minimal scope of all corporations is always prescribed by two sets of conditions, namely the criteria or principles that govern their recruitment of members, and the form or nature of the corporation itself, which define in turn its positive capacities. Those principles that regulate the recruitment and differentiation of members in a corporation or other social unit constitute the basis of the unit concerned; they also define those minimal interests and affairs that the corporation or unit has to regulate in order that it may continue effectively as a unit whose members are recruited and organised on the prescribed lines. Thus, in so far as these relate to collective interests and corporate affairs, the conduct of all members, including the leader and his staff where these are present, are essential objects of corporate regulation, as institutional norms illustrate. Further, as regards the factor of form, for brevity there are two main types of corporations aggregate – that is, those with plural memberships. One, illustrated by corporate categories, lacks the attributes requisite for any positive corporate action, including those of a self-regulatory kind; the corporate category is therefore imperfect. Perfect corporations of any type, which include the corporate group, the college (that is, permanent councils, certain standing committees, etc.) and the office, a variety of corporation sole, have the attributes requisite for positive corporate action, namely inclusive or representative organisation, a set of legitimate procedures, a body of exclusive though common, that is, corporate, affairs, and the autonomy requisite to regulate them by positive corporate action. For present purposes we may ignore councils and offices, since both are always lodged within corporate groups; but in doing so we should distinguish two features that they have in common, firstly, that all are organs and members of some corporate group, and secondly, that in many situations they regulate collectivities which are excluded from the corporate group to which these organs belong.

We have to deal then with three kinds of corporation aggregate:

- (i) those that are self-regulating, solely and always;
- (ii) those that are not self-regulating and must therefore be regulated from outside – these are always corporate categories;
- (iii) those that regulate others as well as themselves – these are always corporate groups.

Clearly corporations of class (iii) presume the presence of class (ii) corporations; and clearly their association institutes an overt stratification explicitly in political-juridical terms and implicitly in other scales such as wealth, prestige, knowledge and style of life. Thus at the minimum, besides regulating the actions and corporate interests of their members, corporations concerned to regulate a stratified order have simultaneously by various means and agencies so to regulate the interests and conduct of the corporate categories or groups subordinate to them as to ensure that they conform to all those conditions that are requisite for the maintenance of the social order and/or the enhancement of the interests of the ruling corporation. These regulatory foci of inter-corporate relations include, *inter alia*; (1) the distribution of technological and economic assets, opportunities and disabilities; (2) the distribution of ritual, moral, theological and cognitive assets, opportunities and disabilities; (3) the distribution of facilities, opportunities and obstacles for social communication, mobility (geographical and social), and especially for collective organisation; and finally (4) effective monopoly or control of all societally relevant political, administrative, military and juridical resources, opportunities and autonomies.

It will be immediately apparent that besides organised justice, government and force, the dominant stratum or its inner ruling core in a hierarchically ordered society must also regulate the social economy, religion, ideology, education and communication structures of the aggregate, together with all opportunities for mobility and organisation among subordinates. Contemporary South Africa illustrates one attempt at such total regulation, the USSR and China some others. In pursuing such regulation, the ruling group seeks to protect and promote the collective interests of its members, and to regulate their individual conduct. Accordingly by these means, and as the decisive condition of their achievement, it seeks to ensure the persistence of the social order with which it is identified. Thus the persistence of any form of social stratification presupposes an effective regulation by the inner core of its ruling stratum organised as a corporate group, not only of relations among its members, relations within the ruling stratum, but also of relations between that stratum and all others, as the objective and condition of an effective and appropriate regulation of the economic, demographic, ritual, ideological, military, organisational, communication and juridical resources and structures of the total society; and to this end it requires either a monopoly or effective control of the public political and

administrative structures. In consequence, should any ruling group or stratum fail adequately to control or direct any of these strategic institutional sectors or the strata they serve to subordinate, its supremacy will be correspondingly weakened by that loss of resources, autonomy, scope, capacity and perhaps by a loss of range as well. However, any substantive change of this kind presupposes some structural change in the articulations of the ruling and subordinate strata; and even though such structural shifts may themselves follow antecedent shifts in the substance or content of the rulers' power, ultimately we can always trace these sequences of substantive change that crystallise, elaborate or destabilise a regulatory order and the stratification over which it presides, either to some prior modification of internal articulations within the ruling group or stratum which altered its external articulations in some significant way, thereby modifying its autonomy, resources, scope and range; or, in the absence of any internal changes among the rulers, we shall find some significant change in the external articulation of the ruling stratum which modified its position and capacities. Clearly such changing external articulations may be initiated by autonomous actions of the ruling or subject strata.

From this it follows that if we seek to study the dynamics of any social stratification, we should first determine its form, scope and range as precisely as we may, and then seek to isolate the requisites of that order, and especially those requisites that define together the minimal properties and conditions of its ruling stratum. With the aid of these principles, we can then specify the precise conditions which are necessary for the persistence of the regime by detailing the requisites for the maintenance of the form and position of the ruling group without change in terms of its appropriate internal and external articulations, scope, autonomy, resources, range and capacity. This done, we may then proceed to translate prevailing distributions of differential privilege and control of the relevant societal structures in the empirical instance under study into these structural and substantive categories; and with these data we may easily distinguish those internal changes which reflect exogenous stimuli from others generated internally.

It will at once be evident, given the many complex conditions the ruling stratum has to control and direct appropriately to perpetuate its position, that we shall only rarely and in very special circumstances find situations in which given strata preserve the stratification without significant change for any period of time. The ideal of a changeless stratification is surely a limiting case, however commonly selected as the goal of ruling strata. On the other hand, we shall rarely encounter such radical reversals or realignments of a stratification as the structuralist notion of transformation requires; and even then such partial transformations normally proceed by violent collective action. Unfortunately for structural theorists, social change, including

changes of social stratification, proceeds diachronically and vertically by chronologically successive modifications of the requisite conditions of empirical structures, and not horizontally or reversibly by some mysterious rearrangements of central components in a common basic model that illustrates the human mind.

NOTES

1 Marx, K. (1959), *Capital*, Moscow, vol. III, pp. 862-3; Marx, K. (1963), *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, New York; Marx, K. and Engels, F. (1948), *The Communist Manifesto*, London. See also Bendix, R. and Lipset, S.M. (1953), 'Karl Marx's theory of social classes', in Bendix, R. and Lipset, S.M. (eds.), *Class, Status and Power*, Glencoe, Ill., pp. 26-34.

2 Schumpeter, Joseph A. (1950), *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, New York, pp. 34-9.

3 Marx (1959), Vol. III, Ch. 52.

4 Weber, Max (1947), *The Theory of Social and Economic Organisation*, trans. A.R. Henderson and T. Parsons, London, pp. 390-5; Gerth, H. and Mills, C.W. (1948), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, London, pp. 180-195.

5 Parsons, T. (1940), 'An analytical approach to the theory of social stratification', *American Journal of Sociology*, XLV, no. 6; Parsons, T. (1953), 'A revised analytical approach to the theory of social stratification', in Bendix and Lipset (eds.) (1953).

6 Parsons (1940); Parsons (1953); Davis, Kingsley and Moore, W.E. (1945), 'Some principles of stratification', *American Sociological Review*, 10; Aberle, D.F. et al. (1950), 'The functional prerequisites of a society', *Ethics*, 60, January.

7 For representative contributions to this debate, see Bendix, R. and Lipset, S.M. (1967), *Class, Status and Power: Social Stratification in Comparative Perspective* (2nd edition), London, pp. 47-96; and Heller, Celia S. (1969), *Structured Social Inequality: A Reader in Comparative Social Stratification*, London, pp. 479-531.

8 Smith, M.G. (1966), 'Pre-industrial stratification systems', in Smelser, Neil J. and Lipset, S.M. (eds.), *Social Structure and Mobility in Economic Development*, Chicago, pp. 141-76.

9 Ferguson, Adam (1966), *Essay on the History of Civil Society, 1767*, Edinburgh; Millar, John (1973), *Observations on the Distinctions of Ranks*, London; Spencer, Herbert (1969), *Principles of Sociology*, ed. Stanislav Andreski, London; Durkheim, Emile (1947), *The Division of Labour in Society*, trans. George Simpson, Glencoe, Ill.

10 Fallers, Lloyd (1963), 'Equality, modernity and democracy in the new states', in Geertz, Clifford (ed.), *Old Societies and New States*, Glencoe, Ill., pp. 162-8; also Smith, R.T. (1970), 'Social stratification in the Caribbean', in Plotnicov, L. and Tuden, A. (eds.), *Essays in Comparative Social Stratification*, Pittsburgh, pp. 46 ff.

11 v. Glass, David (ed.) (1954), *Social Mobility in Britain*, London; and Reiss, Albert J. Jr. (1961), *Occupations and Social Status*, Glencoe, Ill. For conflicting data, see Smith, M.G. (1965), *Stratification in Grenada*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, Ch. 4.

12 For this hybrid conception, v. Harris, Marvin (1969), 'Monistic determinism: anti-Service', *S. West. J. Anthropol.*, 25, pp. 198-206.

13 cf. Durkheim (1947). For comments, v. Barnes, J.A. (1966), 'Durkheim's division of labour in society', *Man n.s.* 1, no. 2, June; and Smith, M.G. (1974), 'The comparative study of complex societies', in Smith, M.G., *Corporations and Society*, London.

14 Weber (1947), pp. 252 ff.

15 Blumer, Herbert (1965), 'Industrialization and race relations', in Hunter, Guy (ed.) *Industrialization and Race Relations*, London, pp. 220-53; Kuper, Leo (1965),