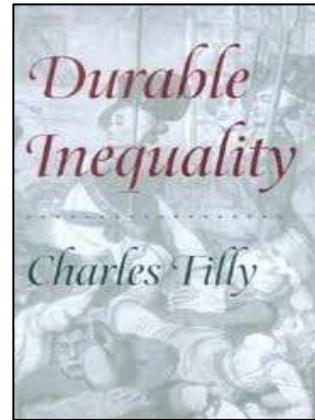


Charles Tilly. 1998. *Durable Inequality*. Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 310 pages.

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“Inequality” is not new in human history, but it received further impetus with the advent of postmodern urban focused industrialization. In the recent years, the global crisis contributed to make the situation worse. Although the contemporary society has experienced increasing per-capita income and GDP growth (United Nations, 2011), it is not very uncommon that many societies are struggling with the vicious circles of poverty and inequality (Sen, 1998). Inequality is an issue that can hinder people from having access to their desired opportunities and can lie at the base of social unrest or chaos. Therefore it is not surprising that “inequality” research is an integral part of global development agenda and human security.

Unfortunately very few scholars have addressed this issue from the multiple perspectives of history, politics and sociology. Charles Tilly is among the few who have studied “inequality” and investigated why long term structural inequalities exist, what their core features are and how do such inequalities form, perpetuate and transform in our societies. In 1998, Tilly wrote his classic book *Durable Inequality*, in an attempt to address the causes, process and consequences of inequality in general, focusing on how inequality persists from generation to generation and contributes to frame the socio-economic and political stratification. Since its publication, this book has gained substantial intellectual respect in different domains of social science, remaining a fundamental work, with constant relevance especially in the current context. Therefore, this book is worthwhile to review, in order to explore the intrinsic aspects of inequality as a whole, allowing the intellectual community to address the challenges posed by poverty and inequality.

In *Durable Inequality*, Tilly claims that inequalities are relational and fundamentally rooted in power asymmetries. At the beginning of the book (Chapter 1), Tilly mentions how differential inequalities are organized around binary or hierarchically bounded categories such as male/female, black/white, citizen/foreigner, or, in the case of hierarchical inequalities, class and caste. In his view, durable inequality mostly depends on the institutionalization of categorical pairs. In exploring the roots of categorical inequality, Tilly finds that people usually establish the categorical inequality by two causal mechanisms: exploitation and opportunity hoarding, and these in turn install the categorical inequality. At the same time, organizations that are a well-bounded cluster of social relationships, such as households, religious sects, local communities etc., can also lead to categorical inequality. Apart from these, the spatial location of the community and household and parental resources can have tremendous impacts on individual cognitive skills, quality of schooling, individual educational outcomes and certain adult characteristics. All these factors contribute to economic outcomes, as well as help to frame the social outcomes of human development. Categorical inequality operates in the domain of collective experience and social interaction. Inequality consists of an uneven distribution of attributes among a set of social units, such as individuals, categories, groups or regions. In addition, Tilly finds three major problems of estimating inequality in any social units: identifying and bounding the units, assessing the importance of different goods, and deciding whether the weighted differences are large or small.

In Chapter 3, Tilly discusses categorical relations and categorical inequality, which are highly intertwined in any socioeconomic and political context. Usually “categories” take a relational form, such as women forming a category that excludes men and, in the same way, blacks forming a category that excludes whites. Tilly believes these categories are the major reason for long-term durable inequality in any society. Tilly identifies two types of categories: interior categories and exterior categories. Interior categories are usually originated in organizations such as faculty vs. students, management vs. workers, while exterior categories do not originate in a given organization; usually they come from outside. For example, there are some ritualized differences between male and female in religious organizations. The difference is made by the presence or absence of boundaries that separate unequal categories, with well-scripted social relations across boundaries. According to Tilly, substantial inequality with the absence of boundary generates rivalry, or sometimes jealousy.

Tilly mentions that categorical inequality results from the institution of a general, powerful, problem solving organizational form, and the asymmetrically related categorical pair. This can provide benefits by simplifying social life and facilitating the production of collective goods. In the same time, it is also true that categorical inequalities cause harm to the excluded and deprive them from access to what could be collective goods, producing a net underuse of potentially life-enhancing talent. Categorical inequality facilitates the extraction of efforts from subordinate populations without fully sharing the returns of those efforts.

Later in the book (Chapter 6), Tilly discusses emulation and adaptation within the larger framework of categorical inequality. Emulation is the reproduction of organizational models operating elsewhere, while adaptation keeps the systems of categorical inequality in place despite playing little part in their creation. Adaptation has two major components: the invention of procedures that ease day to day interaction and the elaboration of valued social relations around existing divisions. Tilly believes exploitation and opportunity hoarding can initiate the categorical boundaries within organizations, and emulation and adaptation reinforce those effects. He adds that, to some extent, opportunity hoarding and exploitation are interdependent, but opportunity hoarding is also possible without exploitation. At this point, he gives the example of the Italian migrant community, which gained a modest but secure existence by controlling adjacent economic niches and excluding non-Italians from those niches. In this process, they employed little or no non-Italian labor. Therefore we can assume that opportunity hoarding largely depends on the well-established ethnic networks. Ethnicity and/or religion supply the categorical basis of opportunity hoarding. Opportunity hoarding in general brings together a distinctive network, valuable resources that are renewable, subject to monopoly, supportive of network activities, and enhanced by the network's *modus operandi*, that is the sequestering of those resources by network members and the creation of beliefs and practices that sustain the control over the resources.

Tilly's discussion on categorical inequality allows us to understand that categorical inequality usually emerges from multiple categorically differentiated experiences. All his illustrations reproduce different patterns of categorical and durable inequality. Interestingly, he also adds that nationalism can be the reason for categorical inequality and can contribute to differential opportunities through exploitation and opportunity hoarding.

In Chapter 7, Tilly elaborates his thoughts on social movements. He mentions that social movements can challenge exploitation, opportunity hoarding, emulation, and adaptation. We may find the same connotations in the recent movements of the Arab Spring, as well as in the “Occupy Wall Street” movement, which involve a greater amount of collective claims on established authorities. However, these types of social movement are not always the panacea. Even though Tilly admits the positive societal impact of social movement, he also mentions the opposite side of it. In his view, the global political mobilization on behalf of religious, ethnic, and national categories is promoting new, destructive forms of inequality, making democracy less sustainable. Tilly not only discusses different forms of inequality, the reasons or processes behind them, but he also tries to cover how we can address the contemporary inequality within or outside of the existing social institutions.

This book is highly recommended for every contemporary social science reader, particularly those who are concerned with differential dimensions of poverty, inequality or social stratification. It is obvious that, in the present sociopolitical context, inequality issues are becoming more important in the public policy arena due to the contemporary socio-economic, political and environmental fragmentations and transformations. In the coming years or decades, in the context of ongoing globalization, inequality-related challenges will remain relevant, and Tilly’s classic intellectual contribution from *Durable Inequality* remains a fundamental and powerful approach that should not be overlooked by scholars or policy-makers.

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