I

Breaking and Entering

[In the pre-industrial era,] those engaging in popular disturbances are sometimes peasants. . . , but more often a mixed population of what in England were termed "lower orders" and in France menu peuple. . . *; they appear frequently in itinerant bands, "captained" or "generaled" by men whose personality, style of dress or speech, and momentary assumption of authority mark them out as leaders; they are fired as much by memories of customary rights or a nostalgia for past utopias as by present grievances or hopes of material improvement; they dispense a rough-and-ready kind of "natural justice" by breaking windows, wrecking machinery, storming markets, burning their enemies of the moment in effigy, firing hayricks, and "pulling down" their houses, farms, fences, mills or pubs, but rarely by taking lives.* George Rudé, *The Crowd in History*

Thus, in sixteenth-century France, we have seen crowds taking on the role of priest, pastor, or magistrate to defend doctrine or purify the religious community—either to maintain its Catholic boundaries and structure, or to re-form relations within it. We have seen that popular religious violence could receive legitimation from different features of political and religious life, as well as from the group identity of the people in the crowds. The targets and character of crowd violence differed somewhat between Catholics and Protestants, depending on their sense of the source of the danger and on their religious sensibility. But in both cases, religious violence had a connection in time, place, and form with the life of worship, and the

> *violent actions themselves were drawn from a store of punitive or purificatory traditions. . . . Even in the extreme case of religious violence, crowds do not act in a mindless way.*
>
> Natalie Zemon Davis,
> *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*

> *All of these [seventeenth-century French] risings involved significant numbers of peasants, or at least of rural people. Their frequency, and the relative unimportance of land and landlords as direct objects of contention within them, require some rethinking of peasant rebellion. The universal orientation of these rebellions to agents of the state, and their nearly universal inception with reaction to the efforts of authorities to assemble the means of warmaking, underscore the impact of statemaking on the interests of peasants. . . . In the seventeenth century the dominant influences driving French peasants into revolt were the efforts of authorities to seize peasant labor, commodities, and capital.* Charles Tilly, *As Sociology Meets History*

One of the most significant developments in European historical studies in the last four decades has been the explosion of research that allows us to take ordinary people seriously as political actors long before the creation of stable parliamentary democracies. Inspired variously by such well-known examples as George Rudé's project of identifying the "faces in the crowd," Natalie Zemon Davis's careful elucidation of the "meaning" of riots and popular protests, and Charles Tilly's account of the changing patterns of "popular collective action," literally hundreds of scholars have set off to the archives to discover the particulars of what we might label the history of popular politics. Over the years their research has not only enriched our sense of the variety of actors but also revealed the diversity of their political messages and the range of their actions. Never before have ordinary people—which is to say, those who were excluded from the realm of officialdom; subjects as opposed to rulers—seemed so active and noisy, so eminently capable of shaping their own history.

So what kind of history did these ordinary Europeans make? In what concrete ways did ordinary people influence and shape their political destinies? To what extent can ordinary Europeans be said to have created their own political futures rather than being condemned merely to suffer the impositions of their more powerful superiors? Given the richness and diversity of the accumulated research, it may be somewhat surprising that there have been very few attempts to synthesize the results, but on the face of it, most historians will find questions like these to be hopelessly

broad and impractical. To date, those authors who have sought to reassemble the myriad pieces of popular microhistory into larger packages have either limited their work to a certain category of events—such as urban riots or peasant rebellions—or focused on a relatively bounded territory—typically the domain, or some subunit, of a modern national state. Given the large and linguistically diverse literature, such limiting strategies are obviously practical, but the history of popular politics surely transcends the territorial boundaries of provinces, national states, and linguistic groups and defies the categorical limits that separate "riots" from "rebellions," "revolts" from "revolutions," and the whole lot of such events from merely nonviolent action. Indeed, unless we intentionally ask questions that transcend the categorical limits and the territorial boundaries of the current literature, we will never find the answers and thus squander the excellent opportunity we now have to replace the old elite-centered histories of European politics with something significantly new.

Building on the accumulated studies of popular collective action, then, this book attempts to synthesize what might usefully be called the social history of European politics during the particularly tumultuous era that began with the Protestant Reformation and ended with the so-called Crisis of the Seventeenth Century. If social history is concerned with how ordinary people actively "lived the big changes" in history (Tilly 1985:11), then the "early modern" period is an especially valuable laboratory, not only because of the voluminous literature on popular political behavior, but because it is replete with "big changes." Besides the disintegration of the Roman Catholic church and the consequent reshaping of the European cultural and political landscape, this period also witnessed both the rise of a European world economy and a military revolution that inaugurated the era of European domination on a global scale (see Wallerstein 1974, 1980; Parker 1988). In highlighting the political action of ordinary people in relation to the transformation of the cultural and political landscape of Europe, this study naturally takes issue with a number of scholarly interpretations of these big changes. It explicitly undermines elite-centered accounts of both the Reformation and the consolidation of a peculiarly European system of states, but it also questions more implicitly the direct correlation of capitalist development and changes in warfare with the emergent patterns of state formation in early modern Europe. In a far more constructive sense, however, my primary goal is to describe and account for the variety of ways in which ordinary people, by breaking their rulers' exclusive claims to political and cultural

sovereignty and boldly entering political arenas that were legally closed to them, helped to shape the cultural and political landscape of modern Europe.

Toward a Social History of European Politics

Before we set off on this synthetic quest, it is important to recognize just how far we have already come and to clarify some of the concepts that are essential to the book's argument. Let us begin in the realm of political history by underscoring how far we are now removed from the days when historians were primarily concerned with recording or glorifying the deeds of (monarchical) rulers and their principal (military) agents. Even when elite patronage of historical writing gave way in the nineteenth century to professionalization in university departments, (political) historians still focused on war making, diplomacy, and courtly intrigue during eras characterized by "feudalism," the "new monarchies," or "absolutism"; they magisterially assigned praise or blame to the leading actors depending on their apparent success or failure in the story being told. More recently, however, historians who are directly concerned with politics have, on the whole, become much more critical of the "official story" embedded in the archives and annals of those who claimed authority over the lives of ordinary people. Focusing on the routine practice as opposed to the theoretical claims of early modern government, we now realize, for example, just how indirect and limited the authority of even "absolute" monarchs actually was; indeed, one very thoughtful analysis has recently described the "myth of absolutism" as the now-moribund product of sixteenth-century anti-French propaganda filtered through the distorting lens of nineteenth-century nationalism (Henshall 1992; see also Collins 1995). At the same time, closer attention to the differences among European states has undermined the notion of a singular, normative path of European political development and yielded instead to a more broadly comparative understanding of divergent paths of early modern state consolidation in relation both to the economic geography of preindustrial Europe and the changing fortunes and technology of war (see Rokkan 1975; Blockmans 1989; Tilly 1990; Downing 1992; Ertman 1997).

The research agendas of social historians have also changed dramatically. George Trevelyan, combating the hegemony of political history,

asserted for better or worse that social history was history with the politics left out; in a similar vein the French Annales school defiantly distinguished between the *longue durée* of social, economic, and even geological processes and the mere events of political history. Not surprisingly, the social history that first gained a toehold within history curricula often emphasized the enduring social and demographic structures of premodern societies and the conservatism or even the immutability of "traditional" cultures. Still, a few pioneers like Natalie Davis, George Rudé, and Edward Thompson doggedly explored the interfaces between social and political history, identifying the faces of individual actors within riotous "crowds" and interpreting the often symbolic meaning of politically contentious action by ordinary people. Others, such as Barrington Moore, put macrohistorical questions on the research agenda—questions that linked the political actions or alignments of ordinary people with macrohistorical processes like state formation and the rise of capitalism. Still others, such as Charles Tilly and Yves-Marie Bercé, proposed that violent conflict and rebellion provided especially valuable clues to popular political aspirations and capacities because authorities usually documented them with care. Each of these strands proved to be valuable in itself, yet a healthy eclecticism and cross-fertilization have served to retard the growth of mutually antagonistic schools or camps. Gradually, then, the study of "collective action" or "collective violence" in general and "crowds," "riots," and "popular protest" in particular became quite respectable as a specialized field of inquiry within social history.

The problem is that in explicating collective behavior or reconstructing the microhistory of particular events—that is, by focusing on ordinary people as intentional actors—the current social-historical literature separates popular politics from the main line of political history. Indeed, the political actions of ordinary people are typically the *explicandum*—that which needs to be explained by independent variables outside the realm of popular politics—rather than a part of the explanation of large-scale historical change. The unfortunate result is that popular political actors are more often than not portrayed as the noble, if largely ineffectual, victims of larger historical processes far beyond their control. The challenge for the next generation of research is, as I see it, to move beyond the study of intentional action to the exploration of consequential action—to link the more fragmented histories of popular political action with the newer accounts of varied political development within Europe in ways that allow us to see the extent to which ordinary people were fully fledged political actors, capable of shaping their own history.

In other words, the specific task of the social historian of European politics is to explore the ways in which ordinary people were directly implicated in larger causal sequences that can be said to account for the different paths of political-historical change.

To envision this kind of comparative social history of politics, it is essential to define "politics" in sufficiently broad and inclusive terms—in terms that diminish the salience of such hoary questions as *whether* ordinary people were political or *when* they finally became political and highlight instead the variety of ways in which they *actually were* political prior to or outside the institutionalization of some form of popular sovereignty. To this end, it is useful to regard politics as an ongoing bargaining process between those who claim governmental authority in a given territory (rulers) and those over whom that authority is said to extend (subjects).[1] As unconventionally vague as it may seem at first blush, this is a relatively restrictive conception of politics in the sense that it singles out the interactions between rulers and their subjects or citizens.[2] It is thus not concerned with relations of power as such; nor does it focus directly on the "politics" of the bedroom or the "politics" of the workplace. This is nevertheless an expansive notion of politics in the sense that it includes within the scope of the political bargaining process, for example, popular protests that fall short of demands for the direct exercise of political authority and political movements that develop outside the realm of electoral or directly representational political systems. What makes "ordinary" people ordinary in this strictly political sense is their status as political subjects. Thus in situations in which power is concentrated in a very few hands, it is quite possible that people who in a social,

1. Cf. Reddy 1977: 89, who notes the shortcomings of bargaining theories of popular politics; he argues, in particular, that "the idea of political bargaining short circuits the question of political legitimacy." Here the idea of an ongoing political bargaining process will not be taken to exclude popular challenges to claims of political legitimacy made by or on behalf of their rulers. My argument is simply that such challenges are not different in kind from more routine political interactions where the legitimacy of established or putative rulers is not immediately or overtly at stake; indeed, all forms of extralegal or extraconstitutional political action can be said to strain at the boundaries of political legitimacy. See also Tilly 1978, Scott 1987; Tarrow 1989.

2. It is important to note, of course, that not all people who by this definition will be considered political subjects would choose this as an acceptable self-description. This applies equally to the early modern "burgher" and the modern "citizen." Still, the individual liberties or collective sovereignties typically claimed by burghers and citizens notwithstanding, the basic fact of political life is that the "many" are always governed by the "few." See Morgan 1988 for a particularly searching historical account of the "opinions" or "fictions" that can be said to sustain this fact in modern America.

economic, or cultural sense could hardly be described as ordinary are nevertheless usefully seen as "ordinary" political subjects. By extension, what makes "popular" politics popular is its position relative to the domain of rulers and the politics of the official "elite."

To see politics as an interactive bargaining process, however, is also to insist that variations and changes in the realm of popular politics cannot be treated in isolation from variations and changes in the structures of political power or, broadly speaking, the history of state formation. This means that a history of popular politics in early modern Europe, in particular, must take into account not only the long-term consolidation (or disintegration) of power within specific polities but also the gradual elaboration of an interactive system of states within Europe as a whole. But how are we to conceive of the relationship between the history of popular politics, often enacted at the local level, and the history of state formation on a much grander scale? A volume of essays on the relations between cities and states in Europe suggests a useful point of departure that allows us to build on the most recent literature: "In Europe before 1800 or so, most important changes in state structure stemmed from rulers' efforts to acquire the requisites of war, from resistance to those efforts, and from bargains that ended—or at least mitigated—that resistance" (Tilly and Blockmans 1994:10). In this way, the ongoing bargaining process between subjects and rulers, which includes, for example, the pattern of tax revolts and conscription riots that punctuated the political history of Europe from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, necessarily becomes a central concern within any convincing account of European state formation. But even more important, such a focus on political interaction takes us beyond the motives and intentions of political actors and highlights instead the often unintended consequences of the political bargaining process. This is not to say, of course, that motives and intentions are irrelevant; rather, in the absence of reliable or unequivocal evidence in this regard, as is often the case, we can nevertheless treat popular political action as an integral part of the political process.

It is fundamentally mistaken, however, to assume that the history of popular politics is for the most part the tragic story of an essentially reactionary and futile *resistance* to the inexorable rise of a system of national states. First, we know that not all resistance to the claims of European governments was or is futile. Indeed, as we shall see in the account that follows, in the most obviously successful cases of resistance to Habsburg dynasticism, popular political action helped to precipitate and fashion entirely new polities like the Swiss Confederation and the Dutch

Republic (Brady 1985; Parker 1985; Duke 1990). In other less spectacular cases, like the widespread and predictable resistance to increasing taxation, popular action could bend and shape public policy in significant ways even though resistance was not always expressed in open revolt and most tax revolts did not result in revolutionary transformations of power (see Dekker 1982; Schulze 1984; Scott 1987; Briggs 1989; Robisheaux 1989). Second, it is obvious that the claims that European rulers made on their subjects varied significantly in time and place. In the realm of taxation alone, both the character and the extent of the state's fiscal exactions separated the more agrarian regions of Europe from their more commercialized neighbors, creating disparities not only between states but also within them (see 't Hart 1989; Tilly 1990; Collins 1995). Likewise, the patterns of military recruitment and judicial authority in Europe offered quite variable challenges and opportunities to rustics and city folk, to the inhabitants of Europe's urban, commercialized core and its more rural, agrarian periphery. But in this period it was frequently the forceful claims of a variety of rulers to an unprecedented degree of cultural sovereignty—that is, final decision-making authority in matters of religious ritual and belief for whole polities—that were met variously with resistance or approval among their subject populations. It is precisely the relationship between the resistance or cooperation of subjects and the variably enforceable demands of rulers that we need to explore through broadly conceived and systematic comparison. Finally, and perhaps most important, it is clear that not all popular political action was simply reactive; indeed, as I shall argue below, when it was directed toward the reformation of religious ritual and belief, the political action of ordinary people could serve to legitimate or extend the authority of their rulers in surprising ways. For all these reasons, then, it is important to replace the easily romanticized concept of popular "resistance" with the less colorful but more flexible and inclusive concept of "popular political practice."

The Spatial and Cultural Dimensions of Political Interaction

To reconstruct the social history of politics, then, we need not only to examine the variable forms of popular political practice but also to situate them within the different political contexts in which popular political action takes place. Traditional accounts of European state

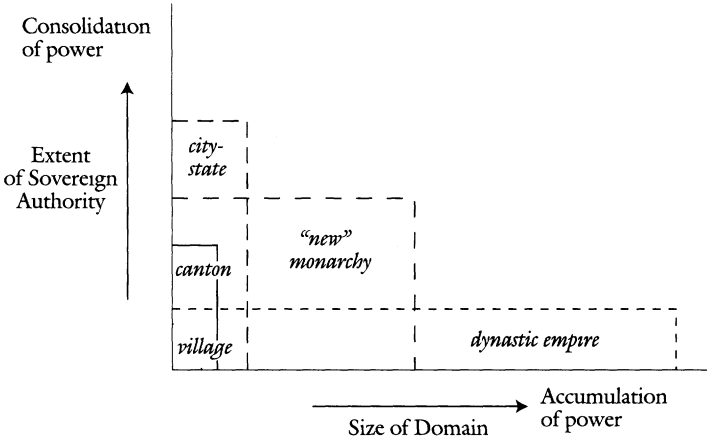

Figure 1. Variable dimensions of political space

formation, highlighting selected aspects of the experience of a few relatively centralized and autocratic monarchies, suggested a fairly direct, linear development from feudal monarchies to national states in the period between, say, 1200 and 1850 (cf. Strayer 1970). In fact, however, Europeans lived in a wide variety of political contexts at the end of the Middle Ages and, having started in different circumstances, experienced the process of state formation along widely divergent paths. To look simultaneously and comparatively at political interactions in these diverse and changing contexts, then, it is useful to think of the interactive bargaining process of politics in spatial terms. A "political space" can be defined as an arena, bounded in terms of both authority and territory, within which political bargaining can occur. The dimensions of such a political space vary, on the one hand, according to the extent to which those who rule within it exercise sovereign authority—that is, they can make independent, enforceable decisions with regard to issues of importance to their subjects—and, on the other, according to size of the domain—the physical territory and the population—over which that sovereign authority extends. Figure 1 suggests how we might visualize the dimensions of different kinds of political space.

Using this formulation of the concept of political space, it is possible to highlight graphically the differences among polities in a particular era. Around 1500, for example, city-states like Venice, with a broad range of authority concentrated in its ruling oligarchy, would stretch toward the upper left of the diagram. Dynastic empires like the expansive Habsburg

imperium, by contrast, would extend toward the lower right. Village communes, with authority to make critical decisions over communal property, for example, would show up in the lower left whereas a small canton like Luzern within the Swiss Confederation concentrated an impressive degree of sovereignty, short of making war, in the hands of its magistrates. The so-called new monarchies, like the France of Francis I, would extend closer to the middle of the diagram with the proviso that the sovereign reaches of their royal governments typically exceeded their grasps.

This concept of political space also allows us to distinguish more fundamentally between two important dimensions of historical change that are frequently conflated in the notion of state formation, which in most iterations bespeaks the teleology of the modern "national" or "consolidated territorial" state (cf. Ertman 1997). In the early modern period especially—the period in which the European system of states first took shape—one must distinguish between the *accumulation* of power that typically resulted from a dynastic policy of adding new pieces of territory to an existing domain through skillful marriage alliances, inheritance, and conquest and the *consolidation* of power that was entailed in the extension of governmental authority over matters of consumption, welfare, and religion. Such distinctions obviously reflect, at bottom, the pretensions or claims of putative state makers because it is these claims that frame the extended conversations that constitute the political processes we are considering here. But the political bargaining process does not follow the directional schemes and tendencies of rulers alone. From the point of view of their political subjects, of course, movement toward the upper right along the diagonal of figure 1—that is, essentially the old, idealized linear development from feudal principalities to national states—undoubtedly seemed less desirable or inevitable than it did from the perspective of those who sought to augment and consolidate claims to sovereignty within territorial states. The point is, however, that neither the state maker's nor the state resister's perspective is sufficient. On the contrary, the actual trajectories of political development in Europe must be seen as the product of the interacting claims and counterclaims of rulers and subjects in changing times and variable spaces. To be sure, the pretensions of Europe's many rulers conditioned and channeled the political choices available to ordinary people, but choices there always were.

Since a political space can only be entered or filled by actors who are able to mobilize or deploy resources appropriate to it, the mobilization or deployment of resources within a political space can be usefully seen

as both a political and a cultural process.[3] Among the existing opportunities for meaningful action afforded by specific social and political circumstances, all actors—both rulers and subjects—make choices that are bounded and mediated by cultural experience. As circumstances change, however, these actors learn to express new kinds of claims and to invent new forms of claim making.[4] Indeed, to describe and account for the choosing, the learning, and the inventing that ordinary people do in the course of filling the political spaces available to them may be considered one of the central analytical problems of the social history of politics. For it is precisely in the realm of choosing, learning, and inventing that ordinary people can be said to be making their own political history—to be shaping and enforcing essential, if often informal, bargains with their rulers.

Looking at the history of popular politics from a cultural perspective entails several different kinds of analysis. At the microhistorical level of particular communities and specific events, it is important to try to discern the political significance of often symbolically expressive collective action; for within the larger comparative history of popular politics, it is important to think of expressive actions like demonstrations and riots as an integral part of an interactive political process—as statements within an ongoing conversation. Since political bargaining requires communication, the various signs and symbols of popular collective action afford us invaluable glimpses of the range of social and cultural resources that ordinary people draw on in entering and filling the political spaces available to them. But given that repression or reprisal is a constant threat in most forms of political domination, much of the political action of subordinate populations "requires interpretation precisely because it is intended to be cryptic and opaque" (Scott 1990:137). Though it is fraught with epistemological uncertainties, the careful description and explication of various forms of popular collective action is a well-established problem in microhistorical research; indeed, it continues to be one of the most inventive and inspiring developments within the realm of "history from below."[5]

On a rather different plane, it is important to analyze and account for

3. For useful summaries of the considerable literature on resource mobilization, see especially Tilly 1978 and Tarrow 1989.

4. For a penetrating analysis of this kind of transformation at a fairly early date in England's history, see Justice 1994.

5. Excellent examples of this kind of microhistorical examination of particular events abound, but the work of historical anthropologists emphasizing the need for "thick

the cultural dynamics and consequences of multiple political interactions within particular polities, those that occur in concentrated clusters in revolutionary situations as well as more attenuated series of challenges and responses.[6] In his general accounts of the changing "repertoires" of contention in France and Great Britain, Charles Tilly (1986, 1995) explicitly uses the metaphor of jazz improvisation to suggest the cultural dimensions of the long-term history of popular political action. In his work on social movements, Sidney Tarrow (1989, 1994) also suggests more generally how we might link cycles of protest (as distinct from revolutionary situations) to cycles of reform, stressing in particular how these cycles produce and replicate innovations in the language and techniques of popular collective action. What is especially important about such relatively rare events as revolutions and widespread cycles of protest is that they usually reveal the hidden dimensions of a particular political culture.[7] But it is equally important to be attentive to subtler and less spectacular yet equally direct challenges that are often allowed within the rules of established regimes (cf. Beik 1997). Taken together, the generally accepted rules of political behavior—that is, the culturally specific "legitimacy" of political action undertaken by both subjects and rulers in specific historical settings—as well as the overall dimensions of what

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description" is certainly the most sophisticated. For practical examples of historical-anthropological analysis as well as important discussions of theoretical orientation, see especially Isaac 1982 and Burke 1987. For the continuing inspiration of the work of E. P. Thompson and Natalie Davis, in particular, see the article by Suzanne Desan in Hunt 1989. James C. Scott's work (1990:esp. chap. 6) seems indispensable, however, in that it draws on the historical research on popular collective action in Europe but challenges us to go beyond the narrow definitions of political behavior that are often embedded in that literature. For examples of the distinctive genre of microhistory in Italian studies, see Levi 1988; Muir and Ruggiero 1991; Muir 1993.

6. Aya 1990 argues that in order to "bring the people back in" to the study of revolution, we must try above all to understand the *rationality* of the multiple, complex, and often difficult political choices that ordinary people have to make in such conflicted and anxious circumstances. To that end, he not only invokes the example and critical methods of cultural anthropologists but also insists on distinguishing in particular revolutionary situations between the intentions, the capabilities, and the opportunities of collective actors. Much of this comports well with what I am arguing for popular politics more generally, except that instead of "intentions" I have spoken of the "claims" of popular political actors. While I agree that ordinary people must be considered intentional actors, I am not so sure that we can with very great certainty infer their intentions from the claims they make on their rulers in the course of political negotiations.

7. This seems to be true not only because established authorities (and contemporary observers) document them with special care but also because political subordinates are often emboldened to express, in such exceptional circumstances, opinions and political claims they might normally keep hidden (see Scott 1990).

James C. Scott (1990) calls the "official transcript" may be said to constitute the dominant political culture of any given political space.

This last point brings us to the critical question of cultural innovation and, in particular, the role of ordinary people in the process of political-cultural change. This problem especially requires both a long-term and an internationally comparative perspective; for, as it happens, the most profound changes in political culture often emerge only gradually over long stretches of time, and they are often confirmed and maintained as a function of conflict and change within the larger system of states.[8] Meanwhile more or less routinized oppositions within a particular polity sometimes belie fundamental agreements in the realm of political discourse that are only evident when they are compared to other more or less routinized oppositions (cf. Schulze 1984; Prak 1991; Underdown 1996). The gradual rise and ongoing mutation of a militarily competitive system of variously sovereign states and within those states the gradual assertion and legitimation of a variety of forms of political sovereignty are but the most obvious and perennially intriguing political-cultural transformations in modern European history. The central argument of this book is that none of these innovations can be said to be the product of a specific era or of a particular polity; neither can they be said to be the work of rulers alone.

Ordinary People in European Politics (ca. 1500)

To understand more clearly the history and significance of popular political practice, we must come to a fuller appreciation of both the variety of political opportunities that political subjects enjoyed and the larger consequences of the choices that popular political actors made. The analysts of modern social movements often speak of political opportunity structures outside the "normal" channels of electoral politics; stripped of its present-minded assumptions about electoral politics, this

8. The assertion of monarchical absolutism and the consolidation of territorial states was characteristically a gradual, long-term process in both eastern and western Europe (e.g., Prussia, Austria, France, and Spain), whereas the confirmation of new revolutionary regimes typically involved both international conflict and multiparty treaty agreements recognizing their independence (e.g., the Swiss Confederation and the Dutch and American republics).

idea of geographically and temporally variable structures of political opportunity can be especially useful in the study of "informal politics" in other times and places, especially in those circumstances in which most people are excluded from formal political participation altogether.[9] In the first instance, of course, political opportunities are framed by the specific institutional structures through which rulers exercise their authority, and in this regard the relative openness of formal political structures to popular political bargaining is conditioned by the historically specific limits of governmental coercion or repression. But beyond that we can identify a number of significant variables: the relative stability of political alignments within the polity; the availability to popular political movements of influential allies; and the degree of political division among established political elites. But what is especially important (if also complicated and confusing) for understanding popular politics in the early modern period is to disentangle the multiple and overlapping structures of political opportunity that were obviously inherent within composite states.

At the beginning of the early modern period, around 1500, most Europeans lived within composite states that had been variously cobbled together from preexisting political units by a variety of aggressive "princes" employing a standard repertoire of techniques including marriage alliances, dynastic inheritance, and direct conquest. Some composites, like the Kingdom of England and Wales or the complex mosaic of *pays d'élections* and *pays d'états* in France, were composed of largely contiguous territories; others, like the Spanish Habsburg monarchy (created by the dynastic union of Castile and Aragon, each in itself a composite) or the Habsburg imperium more generally under Charles V, were separated by other states or by stretches of sea (Koenigsberger 1986; Greengrass 1991; Elliott 1992). Since the dynastic "prince" promised to respect the political customs and guaranteed the chartered privileges of these constituent political units, ordinary political subjects within composite states acted in the context of overlapping, intersecting, and changing political spaces defined by often competitive claimants to sovereign authority over them.[10] To the extent that they were oriented to a variety of political spaces defined by a variety of rulers, ordinary people could

9. I am especially indebted here to the excellent summation and theoretical extension of this literature in Tarrow 1989. See also Tilly 1978, 1986.

10. The generic "prince," in the sense of a political force accumulating territory, need not be a singular or a dynastic actor. In the case of the republic of Venice, for example, it was a closely knit oligarchy that added territory to its domain during the conquest of the terra

choose not only when and how to challenge the authority of their rulers but also where. As we shall see below, it was often in the interstices and on the margins of these composite early modern state formations that ordinary people enjoyed their greatest political opportunities.[11] By choosing to oppose the claims of some putative sovereigns, ordinary Europeans were often deliberately reinforcing the claims of constitutionally alternative or competitive rulers who were willing, at least temporarily, to meet their demands or to discuss their grievances and thereby to legitimate their political actions. In composite states especially, political opposition usually entails political alignment as well.

But what practical difference might the choices of popular political actors make? At the very least, a composite state involves three sets of actors: local rulers, national claimants to power, and ordinary political subjects. Figure 2 not only illustrates the obvious political alignments possible within such a state, it specifies the consequences that these different choices/alignments imply. In the first of these alternatives, ordinary political subjects align themselves with local rulers who are willing to champion their perceived interests vis-à-vis a more distant overlord and thereby help to consolidate local self-regulation and decision-making authority. In the second, local rulers align themselves with national claimants vis-à-vis their mutual subjects, thereby reinforcing their political interdependence in what I have called elite consolidation. In the third case, ordinary people align themselves with a more distant overlord who is willing to champion their interests vis-à-vis less responsive or more demanding rulers at home, thereby underwriting the consolidation of a broader territorial sovereignty at the expense of local self-determination.

By its very nature, this kind of complex political arrangement may be said to be particularly volatile because an alignment between any two of the actors promises to exclude the third; at the same time, the continued existence of the third represents the potential for two alternative alignments that implicitly threaten the status quo. Figure 2 nevertheless

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firma; typically the newly conquered territories were guaranteed local "privileges" in return for their submission. See Finlay 1980; Guarini 1995.

11. James Scott's work (1987, 1990) is exemplary in the way that it explores the enormous ingenuity that ordinary people display in "working the system to their minimum disadvantage." In contrast to my approach here, however, Scott's descriptions of the relations of domination and (everyday) resistance tend to be neatly singular and linear, focusing on one set of relations at a time. It is critically important to apply a wide-angle lens to the analysis of the variable dimensions of domination and to the plurality of power in early modern Europe.

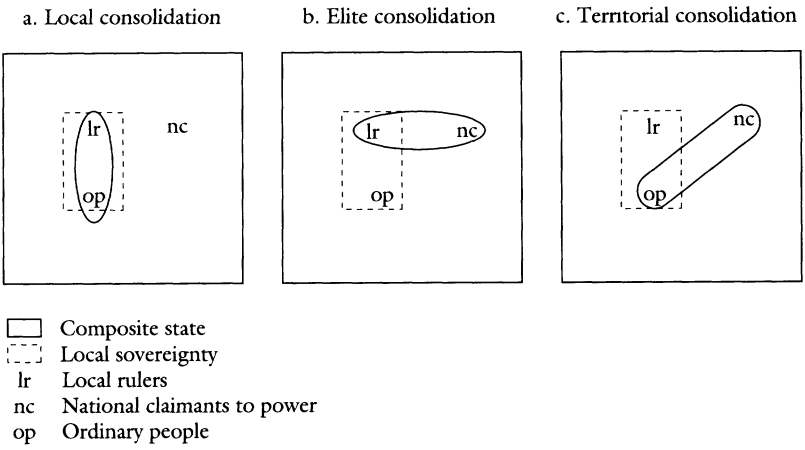

Figure 2. Alignments of political actors within composite states

underestimates the complexity of politics within composite states in at least two important ways. As we shall see below, the constitutional layering of authority can entail more levels than "local" and "national," with district and regional or territorial rulers frequently claiming a piece of the existing "sovereignty."[12] At the same time, each of the principal actors is as often as not subdivided by internal rivalries and competing interests/objectives, producing situations in which all of these competing alignments appear at once; such situations might then be considered "revolutionary" if and when the alternative alignments make and attempt to enforce exclusive political claims that, if accepted, would eliminate their rivals.[13] For our purposes, what is especially instructive about even the stylized alternatives represented in figure 2 is the way in which ordinary people remain salient and potentially decisive actors even under political conditions that appear to guarantee the long-term survival of elite consolidation.[14]

Emphasizing the spatial and cultural perspectives on popular political

12. For the most part, this discussion treats the domain of the local ruler as its basic unit of analysis, but it is clearly evident that within even the local domain a variety of institutions, such as guilds, monasteries, brotherhoods, and families, might claim a significant degree of "private" self-determination.

13. On the nature and significance of exclusive or revolutionary claims, see Tilly 1978.

14. Obviously, these broad principles of alignment and opposition do not apply exclusively to early modern composite state formations. Unfortunately, the teleological myopia of most of the literature on European state formation obscures this element of "modern" state formations like the United States or the European Union.