Chapter 6
Anti-class analysis:
social inequality and post-modern trends

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"Sociology" – observed Melvin Tumin in 1953 – "should not shut the door on inquiry into alternative social arrangement." This remark remains timely today, especially in the context of the "death of class" debate. Ironically, while in the 1950s it was the proponents of class analysis who provoked Tumin's observation by calling for the critical revision of functional schemes, at the turn of the century the need for exploring "alternative social arrangements" is voiced by critics of class theory. Such reversal is symptomatic not only of rapid social change, but also of a transformation of the class idiom into something approximating a sociological orthodoxy. This has been achieved, the critics point out, at the cost of stretching the concept of class, and diminishing sensitivity to other than class forms of social inequality, division and conflict in advanced societies.

There is nothing inherently improper in treating class as a generic concept – a synonym of the key element of the social structure and structured inequality (stratification). However, it becomes problematic when such a generic concept and usage are adopted together with some specific assumptions of the Marxist class theory, and when these specific theoretical claims and meta-theoretical assumptions are introduced into social analysis "at the back", so to speak, of the generic concept of class. This results in "shutting the door" against which Tumin has warned us. Not only every society is assumed to be a class society, but also this universal "classness" is associated with a specific paradigmatic vision of converging socio-economic, socio-cultural and socio-political divisions as envisaged by the Marxist classics. Since there is no realistic alternatives to class – other than utopian visions of egalitarian socialism – there is little questioning of

the reality of class divisions. "Classness", in other words, is universal - merely a matter of degree.

The alternative proposed here is particularization of the class concept along the track paved by sociological classics, especially Alexis de Tocqueville, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim and their contemporary followers. This involves re-articulating the theoretical alternatives to class structure and formation, as well as the corresponding visions of non-class inequality and stratification. It also involves revitalizing the sociological traditions that promoted such visions; and locating class inequality and division in the context of other than class configurations of inequality. By doing that, that is, by clearly separating class from non-class inequalities, divisions and conflicts, one also makes class accounts more meaningfully testable. Only when confronted with alternative conceptualizations and theoretical visions can class theoretical propositions pass the tests of relevance and theoretical vitality. Such a test of relative relevance – against a viable contender – opens a way for a more robust adjudication of the "death of class" debate.

A robust adjudication, it is worth stressing, should also involve a confrontation of class theory and analysis with the late-20th century "megatrends": the rise and collapse of the Soviet system; globalization of finance, production, trade and communication; the rise of Eastern "tiger economies"; the waves of left-libertarian (civil rights, feminist, green, minority rights, etc.) and populist-authoritarian movements in the West; the declining intervention of the state in the areas of redistribution and welfare; the reversal of egalitarian trends in income distribution; the appearance of "new inequalities", including the "knowledge gap"; the formation of "genderized" and "racialized" market segments; and the formation of urban "underclasses" of marginalized and unemployed. While not all these trends are within the scope of class/stratification theories, they nevertheless have to form – in one way or another – core references for assessing the relevance and adequacy of any theoretical vision of social inequality and division, including the class one. Adequate

and relevant concepts and theories should help in "making sense" of these trends – and should do it better than the competitor(s).

In this context, let us look in more details at the troubles posed by class concepts and explanatory schemes.

Troubles with class

The concept of class became generalised and stretched in its application through a specific theoretical deployment in classical Marxism. Marxist class theory derives class interests from the relations of production, but also assumes an inevitable – or at least likely and typical - developmental logic. Conflicting class interests lead to social class formation, and ultimately to the emergence of class-actor. Consequently, class has been identified with a number of quite distinct – and conflated – entities:

(i)   A "generative" structural mechanism producing unequal (and exploitative) class positions, and therefore divisions and conflicts. In some versions this mechanism operates in all post-tribal societies; in other versions is restricted to property and employment relations in capitalism.

(ii)   Unequal social positions and socioeconomic categories. These are nominal classes – categories with shared socioeconomic characteristics.

(iii)   Social groupings with a degree of demographic closure and identity - real social classes, class groupings. Finally, Marxist scholars refer to

(iv)   class actors displaying a degree of cohesion, solidarity and organization. Such classes "for themselves", typically class organizations, are involved in class politics.

This conflation has marked the strength and the weakness of the Marxist class theory. On the one hand, the capacity of this theory to span the domains of structure *and* action, to explain social inequality *and* division, social stability *and* social change, has always constituted its major attraction. Class – and class analysis – it has been argued, are important be-

cause of these links, because of its stress on pervasive social consequences, social impact of class. The downside of the conflation has been a tendency for a conceptual stretch and a theoretical blur (Sartori 1970) resulting in almost infinite plasticity of the class concept.

This poses a number of problems. For a start, the four "classes" are quite distinct entities. The structural concept - let us call it "generative/ explanatory" – refers to a nominal theoretical entity - abstract structural positions in productive (property and market) relations which may, or may not, be sociologically consequential in the sense of affecting patterns of association. Classes become social entities if/when they articulate in the social arena, for example, in patterns of social distances and proximities. Such classes may serve as units of social stratification provided the sufficient level of internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity are established. Distribution of wealth and income can measure the tendencies towards social articulation of such classes. It cannot be assumed, however, that socioeconomic categories turn into sociocultural entities, social groupings with distinct outlooks, values, lifestyles, etc. Well-formed sociocultural classes – "nations within nation" to use Engels' expression – are seldom found. Even more rare are class actors – conscious, solidary and organised groupings formed on the matrix of property/market relations.

While class groupings and actors are seldom found, social groupings formed on the matrix of communal and authority relations are quite common. So are the cases of collective action by status-type groupings (eg. nations, ethnic groups), "imperatively coordinated associations" (Dahrendorf's term) and elites. As contemporary elite theorists point out, the most momentous developments of the last century – the collapse of European communism and the subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union – have been engineered and crafted by the top leadership groups, with remarkably little mass, let alone class, participation.[1]

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[1] This does not deny the possibility of strong "class formation". However, the likelihood and typicality of such formation, and therefore the adequacy of class

The critics of class note the rarity of class formation, but they do not suggest that we should purge class from contemporary social analysis. They rather suggest that class concept and theory serve us better in analyses of early and mature industrial societies than in grasping the social configurations in late or post- industrial ones (eg. Pakulski and Waters 1996). In the latter, the processes of social differentiation and class decomposition diminish the relevance of class theory and the utility of class analysis. Therefore social analysis, especially the analysis of social inequality, division and conflict, has to consider a broad range of social inequalities and their historically variable configurations. This strategy of particularization of class is advocated here.

The contemporary defenders of class take on board many of these criticisms, and suggest some theoretical and conceptual innovations that extend the scope of class theory and analysis. For example, Erik O. Wright (eg. 1985, 1997), a prominent proponent of neo-Marxist class theory, follows the generalization strategy. He extends the meaning of class relations beyond productive-property relations, adds numerous "middle classes" to class maps, treats social class formation as variable, and relaxes the assumption of inevitability and centrality of class conflicts. However, in line with more orthodox Marxists, he sees class relationships as exploitative – and hence conflictogenic. The conflicting class interests – and hence social divisions – are drawn across the "fault lines" of property ownership, organizational control and, perhaps most controversially, skill. Wright and his followers also continue to see class (productive) relations and divisions as central in advanced societies, though – and this is an important qualification - increasing in their complexity. In

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concept in social analysis, need to be established by comparing both class and non-class formation. Nor does it deny the historical importance of class. However, the social articulation of class has proven to be territorially and historically variable. For example, class never took root in North America, and social articulation in Europe seems to be waning over the past two decades (eg. Clark et al. 1993, Clark and Hoffman-Martinot 1997, Clark and Lipset 2001).

brief, neo-Marxist scholars suggest that the capitalist class structure generates social division and conflict, but not necessarily solidary or class-conscious groupings. Classes undergo the process of *recomposition*, rather than *decomposition* (see also Hout et al. 1993).

As pointed out by Waters (1991) these reformulations have led to a partial convergence between neo-Marxist and neo-Weberian positions. Contemporary neo-Marxists, such as Wright, incorporate market skills and authority relations in their concept of class, play down class polarization and multiply middle classes. They also focus on class relations and positions (class structure), and treat the social articulation of class (class formation) as variable rather than constitutive of classes. Perhaps most importantly, many class scholars combine the analysis of gender inequality with now broadened class analysis.

In spite of these updates and innovations, class theorists also continue to adhere to some distinctive – and as we argue problematic – assumptions. Thus socioeconomic class still remains for them the main generative mechanism structuring inequality, division and conflict in advanced capitalism. Gender apart, relationships other than socioeconomic are seldom considered as viable competitors for a status of key "generative structures" of inequality and matrices of social formation. Hence a degree of ambivalence entering contemporary class analyses. On the one hand, class theory and class analysis (the latter understood as the analysis of the social impact of class) are still seen by Marxist scholars as most relevant for explaining the structure of social inequality, division and conflict in contemporary advanced societies. On the other hand, it is also acknowledged that this explanatory relevance may vary between societies, their aspects and historical periods (eg. Wright 1997).

The loosening up of the Marxist assumptions on the convergence of class divisions and the inevitability and universality of class formation improves the relevance of class theory and analysis. But – as the critics of class point out (eg. Turner 1996, Holton 1996, Pakulski 2001) – class analysis, even in its most updated versions suggested by Wright and his collabora-

tors, encounters some anomalies. Moreover, the class sceptics claim, class theories offer increasingly modest intellectual returns, especially in accounting for patterns of contemporary social inequality, conflict and change. When applied to key contemporary processes and "mega-trends", their explanatory mileage seems to be modest, to say the least. This sense of disparity between the promise and the delivery, more than anything else, motivates the class sceptics in their pursuit of alternative concepts and approaches.

To sum up: The utility of the class concept and the relevance of class theory in studies of contemporary social inequality, division and conflict cannot be assessed properly from within the class paradigm, that is, under the assumption of universal predominance of class inequality and division. I suggest lifting this assumption by circumscribing and particularising the concepts of class, class stratification and class society. They are seen here as specific structures and social formations contrasted with non-class inequalities, stratification and social division. This enables the evaluation of the *relative* impact of class and *relative* explanatory relevance of class theory and class analysis.

Alternatives to class

The particularization strategy is outlined here in three steps. Starting on a well-trodden Weberian path, we explore the main candidates for the "generative structures" of social inequality and division: property relations based on property rights and market freedoms; communal relations based on established conventions of honour/ prestige/ esteem distribution and supportive value systems; and sociopolitical authority relations based on the strength and legitimacy of state-political rules. These structures are seen as analytically distinct causal complexes of social inequalities: the key distributors of lifechances and matrices of domination. Depending on the most salient causal complex, different types of *social inequalities* predominate. Class inequalities are only one of them. Configurations of inequality – again outlined as ideal types – depend not only on predominant social inequality, but also on the strength of social formation, that is

the processes of clustering and closure, identity and solidarity formation, and organization. Social stratification requires a minimum degree of social formation. When social formation is weak – that is when social distances are blurred, social divisions are complex, cross-cutting, and/or fickle – social inequalities take an unstratified ("classless") form. Social inequalities in advanced societies, it is argued below, seem to shift in the direction of such an unstratified and complex inequality. The processes and stages of historical shift towards such "classless inequality" – not to be confused with egalitarian classlessness - are discussed in the final section below.

(i) *The generative structures – the Weberian legacy*

Social inequality is about asymmetric distribution of key social resources – societal power in the Weberian terminology - and the resulting pattern of hierarchy and domination. The classic sociology sees social inequalities as "multidimentional" and treats class society as one – and not necessarily the most predominant - societal configuration. For Weber (eg.1978:306-7, 927-39), class positions and divisions generated by property relations and the market always coincide and compete with independent status and "party" (it is less confusing to call them "command") positions and social divisions. Status and command mark positions in different spheres of relations. These positions vary independently, and therefore they have to be treated as separate and autonomous aspects of inequality. While they always coexist with class, a clear analytic separation helps in accounting for their uneasy coexistence, and for diverse stratification patterns that result from their mix and fusion.

To put it differently, the Weberian perspective invites us to see the key social resources (such as property, prestige and influence) as systematically attached to positions in three distinct spheres of social relations: market, communal and state-authoritarian. These positions engender differential societal power, that is, overall capacities to make effective claims for valued resources. Such capacities, in turn, open the way for domination and are the key aspect of lifechances for the incumbents of power positions. While the key resources are exchangeable – property,

prestige and authority can be translated into each other – each of the three spheres has its "master" medium or currency, which are respectively money, honour/ prestige/ esteem and influence. Therefore, even when one type of relations forms a dominant matrix of domination and hierarchical group formation, and one type of inequality predominates, it is typically a combination of the three that empower the incumbents of class, status and command positions.

Status positions are locations in which the principal causal component of lifechances – the determinant of societal power – derives from dominant social conventions that apportion prestige, honour or social esteem. This prestige, reflected in and maintained through distinctive lifestyles, forms a basis for effective claims to social resources other than honorific. Status constitutes a sociocultural dimension of inequality; it presupposes normative regulations and the underlying shared cultural values, as well as a systematic social interaction. This makes status complex – and possibly problematic – in contemporary social configuration characterised by pluralism of values and blurred sociocultural boundaries.

When status inequalities predominate – that is, when lifechances reflect well established and legitimized conventions (as reflected in distinctive patterns of social relations, consumption, and styles of life), property and marketable skills, as well as authority relations, play a secondary role as determinants of lifechances. Claims to social resources and power are made on the basis of property/market and state/authority positions are likely to be treated as usurpations. Moreover, status positions typically engender strong group identities and solidarities. Status inequalities, in other words, tend to be associated with strong social formation, that is high degree of social articulation and groupness (Figure 1).

Command positions refer to locations in structured authoritative relations, in which legitimate power, the right to issue binding commands, determines lifechances of incumbents. Most Weberians focus on command structures of the states. There is an obvious reason for this – modern nation-states command vast resources and hold monopolies for enforcing

laws. Thus while steep bureaucratic hierarchies form also in business corporations, churches and armies, the state administrative apparatuses remain the principal loci and sources of the socially important command positions.

The relative salience of command positions increased hand in hand with the "bureaucratic trend" and the ascendancy of rationalised apparatuses of nation-states. Especially during the 20th century wars, the pervasive state bureaucracies and elites in Europe were operating in a relatively autonomous manner, that is independently of the market and property relations. With a remarkable degree of prescience (he died two years before the formation of the Soviet Russia), Weber also suggested that state bureaucracies could suppress and overshadow the impact of class by controlling, or even destroying, the market. This would not bring – and here Weber was addressing mainly Marxist socialists – classless egalitarianism. State authority relations could generate inequality and stratification of its own – classless inequality. While in the class system lifechances and societal power follow property ownership and market endowments, in partocratic systems of command-generated "ranks" lifechances and power are distributed according to the proximity to the partocratic "centre."

Both Weber and his followers have argued convincingly for maintaining analytic separation between these three structural mechanisms, dimensions of social inequality and forms of social stratification. These arguments have been typically directed against Marxist strategies of subsuming them under the single concept of class and socioeconomic (productive) class relations.[2]

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[2] It is the relative prevalence, relative salience of generative spheres of relations, that is important in shaping the pattern of social inequality, mode of stratification and the overall type of society. "Depending on the prevailing mode of stratification," he observes, "we shall speak of a 'status society' or a 'class society'." (1978:306). Most historical societies analysed by Weber - in fact, all societies other than the modern Western type - have been described as "status societies," that is societies in which other than class inequalities had been most salient.

Figure 1. Generative structures, social inequalities and strata – an analytic (Weberian) scheme

Systemic/structural analysis   ←-----------------------→   Social/group analysis
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Generative structures   **Social formation**
(sources of inequality)
                            _____
                            Strata formation   Group formation
                            Clustering & closure   Consciousness & identity

Class (property & market)   *Class stratification*   *Class division*
relations & positions   *Social classes*   *& solidarity*

Status (communal)   *Status stratification*   *Status division*
relations & positions   *Status groupings/estates*   *& solidarity*

Command (authority)   *Command stratification*   *Command division*
relations & positions   *Social ranks/blocs*   *& solidarity*

       In line with these arguments, class positions are seen here as engendered in property and market relations. The lifechances in such positions are determined by ownership of property (capital) and by market endowments, such as marketable skills. Hence class presupposes market, though not necessarily capitalism. Markets had existed in pre-capitalist societies, and they also persist in state-socialist societies. Modern capitalism, that is a system of generalised commodity production and "capital accounting", favours class; and market relations tends to become, according to the Weberian orthodoxy, the principal structuring mechanism under the modern Western industrial capitalism. At this point I would like to part path with this orthodoxy, and argue that this may not be the case in the "postindustrial" phase, under the impact of "postmodern" trends.

(ii)   Generative structures – an update

When writing about status groups, Weber had in mind mainly such *tradi-tional* status groupings as pre-modern European estates and Indian castes, that is large-scale sociocultural strata reinforced by religion, law and morality. However, he also mentioned, albeit briefly, a different type of status inequalities and groupings, namely those emerging out of educa-tional, occupational-professional and bureaucratic hierarchies in the processes of rationalization and the spread of "credentialism"[3]

> The development of the diploma from the universities, and business and engineering colleges, and the universal clamour for the creation of educational certificates in all fields make for the formation of a privi-leged stratum in bureaus and offices. Such certificates support their holders' claim for intermarriages with notable families, claims to ad-here to "codes of honour"… claims for a "respectable" remuneration rather than remuneration for work well done, claims for assured ad-vancement and old-age insurance and, above all, claims to monopolise social and economically advantageous positions. (Weber 1948: 241-2)

Success in credentializing occupations depends not only on legitimacy of sociocultural conventions (backed by values), but also on securing spon-sorship of large organizations, principally the state. States' willingness and capacity to maintain, defend and enforce conventionalised claims is a crucial factor in their social reproduction and their capacity to give rise to distinct social strata. As both Weber and Perkin stress, the claims of credentialised categories, especially the professionals, evoke status princi-ple of distribution ("according to status conventions"), and are highly ambivalent, if not outright hostile, towards the class principle of distribu-tion ("according to property and market capacities"). Thus while the professional strategies of closure often utilize the market mechanism, they

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[3]   This is a point subsequently elaborated by Harold Perkin (1989) and Frank Parkin (1979).

do it through restriction and distortion of the competitive market principles and by ignoring the "naked property rights."

Unlike the estates and castes, the modern status divisions operate in the secular and legal-rational context. They take a conventional form, which reflects their adjustment to pervasive rationality and the liberal ideology of equal opportunity *cum* merit. One may argue that Weber may have underestimated the fragmenting power of rationalization (and the accompanying forces of occupational differentiation and egalitarian ideologies) to erode established social conventions and status distances, including those engendered in social classes and traditional estates.

He also underestimated the capacity of education to become an autonomous source of status distinction. The impact of education on inequality and stratification has been noted by sociocultural class theorists, such as Pierre Bourdieu, reputation stratificationists, such as Edward Shils, human capital theorists, such as Gary Becker, and students of postindustrialism, such as Daniel Bell. They see education as a source of skills most relevant in occupational allocation – thus "cashed" mainly through the market mechanism. However, both Bourdieu and Bell also point to an independent role of education as a potent source of social esteem and a legitimator of privilege in liberal capitalism. The special status of education (higher and certified education in particular) derives from its privileged role as "knowledge supplier," rather than the source of mere marketable skills. Education, especially higher education, turns into the key social articulator of the universalistic "meritocratic principle" of achievement, and becomes a key marker of lifestyles characterised by intellectual pursuits. This critical role of education is inherent in, and reinforced by the dominant liberal ideology that identifies education with merit.[4]

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[4] Educational categories become not only important status positions but also potent matrices of social formation – a fact confirmed by the strength of educational homogamy, friendship networks and political mobilization (see the studies of new social movements).

To these Weberian leads one should add a Tocqueville-Marshallian one. It concerns a particular form of egalitarian values and practices associated with modern democracy and citizenship. Weber saw command and status positions as structuring mainly the upper part of the inequality spectrum through the formation of corporate (state, party, business, etc.) elites. While this point was extremely well taken, he neglected, again for obvious historical reason, the development of "universal citizenship" in the context of mass-democratic trends. This lacuna has to be filled by bringing in the observations of Alexis de Tocqueville (1862) and the seminal work of T.H.Marshall (1950).

Tocqueville charted the spread in 19th century America of democratic passions and progression of "equality of condition" – an egalitarian culture and political institutions. This progression had, according to de Tocqueville, three aspects: the spread of an egalitarian democratic "spirit" that undermined traditional status hierarchy and the associated privileges by right; the proliferation of democratic opinions, sentiments and manners reflected in everyday conduct; and the formation of the key democratic political institutions.

> [T]he divisions which once severed mankind are lowered; property is divided, power is held in common, the light of intelligence spreads, and the capacities of all classes are equally cultivated; the state becomes democratic, and the empire of democracy is slowly and peaceably introduced into the institutions and manners of the nation. (Tocqueville 1862:Lv)

Paradoxically, one may say, democracy brings some social levelling, but also a new type of hierarchy and division, which de Tocqueville associates with "despotic" tendencies, in particular the emergence of unchecked tutelary power of state elites and administrative apparatuses. On this point, de Tocqueville's ideas converge with the Weberian intuition, though he sees the source of new tyrannical tendencies principally in the weakness of civil society, while Weber and his students (especially Robert Michels) attribute it to the growing organizational strength of political society, especially the ascendancy of bureaucratic state apparatuses and party

machines. Both tendencies rival market and property as mechanisms structuring societal power and domination.

Another rival of class is citizenship. The impact of expanding citizenship was charted by Marshall in the British context and subsequently generalised by Turner (1990). The first aspect of citizenship – the range of citizenship rights - expanded during the 18th-20th century from basic civil liberties (freedom of expression, worship, etc.), through political rights (franchise, standing for office) to "social" (mainly welfare) rights. With them expanded the citizenship-securing institutions of civil courts, parliaments and welfare state. The last of these, in particular, affects class inequalities and divisions by pitching citizenship entitlements against the "power of property" and the "cash nexus." The second aspect of expanding citizenship is the scope of social positions to which citizenship rights are effectively granted. It has widened from propertied adult males to almost all inhabitants of nation-states. This expansion of range and scope of citizenship restricts the operation of the class principle and alters status conventions, thus affecting the patterns of social inequality and stratification in advanced societies.

The changing forms of gender inequalities deserve a special comment. As argued above, gender inequalities constitute typical status inequalities – they are derived from and engendered in traditional (legitimated by persistence) social conventions. These conventions are reinforced by ideology and tradition, but above all coded into age-long discriminatory social practices, especially in the domestic-familial sphere. This strategic link with the domestic division of roles and labour gives gender positions, especially in the eyes of neo-Marxist feminist scholars, a "quasi-class" character. In fact, this location in the pattern of domestic relationships is more usefully thought of as traditional-conventional in the sense of reproduced through a system of long-standing norms (and underlying values) that regulate male-female relations. The rapid change in these norms and values – one of the results of spreading individualism and hedonistic culture - effectively erode traditions, as reflected in the spread of more

egalitarian and partnership models, especially in the "baby-boom" generation.

Gender inequalities do radiate into public spheres, and this results in "genderisation" of occupations, market segments, civic statuses and political roles. But they do not form gender strata. The reason for this has been mentioned above. The proper units of stratification are households and groups, and these combine males and females. Hence the notion of "cross-class" families is a misnomer. Social positions of such families reflect the location of the family-household unit determined mainly by the position of the typically male "household head" (Scott 1996).[5] The diffusion of gender inequalities through mass entry of women into the labour market and the accompanying genderization of occupations and market segments, illustrates the hybridization of contemporary social inequalities.

Hybridization is a two-way process; it involves an interpenetration of two stratifying mechanisms in a way that makes it difficult to disentangle their causal effects. Thus the expansion of the market mechanism that accompanies the process of commodification transforms the market into a "quasi-cultural" force. Status conventions and divisions, which are formed outside the market sphere, become articulated as "market capacities" through widely accepted – and typically taken for granted - restrictions and facilitations in employment and working conditions. The operation of the market, in other words, reflects communal norms and relationships formed outside the sphere of employment. At the same time, these very norms and relations are legitimated and reinforced in the market idiom of skill, efficiency, productivity, etc.

Hybridization progresses with commodification and the expansion of market relations, but it is not restricted to the interpenetration between the market and communal relations. A similar interpenetration occurs between

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[5] However, with the proliferation of single parent household, and with the persisting social disadvantage of single mothers, one may witness a formation of feminised quasi-strata, an element of urban "underclass".

the market and command system, and between the command system and cultural norms. The concentration of industrial production, for example, has accompanied the emergence of corporate managerial positions. The lifechances of the incumbents of such positions are a function of marketable skills, hierarchical location, and the very size *cum* strategic location of the corporation. This is particularly important when private corporate and state hierarchies combine in the process of corporatist fusions – as it occurred in Western Europe in the mid-20th century.[6]

To sum up: It is suggested here that we reserve the term "class inequalities" for inequalities generated by property and market relations. It is also suggested that, in line with the original semantic convention, social classes mean specific social formations - social strata and groupings - that grow on the matrix of these relations. To put it differently, the concept of social class is analytically circumscribed. It refers to real social entities associated with specific "generative" or causal mechanisms operating in resource/ power distribution. They are outcomes of principally economic-productive relations, rather than restrictive sociocultural conventions or political monopolies. Importantly, social classes imply the existence of observable social distances, social divisions and solidarities. Consequently, social classes are seen as possible, but not necessarily universal, features of societies; social inequalities may, or may not, take a form of social classes. To the extend that they do, the societies in question approximate "class society."

This also implies two possible departures from class society: systemic and social. The former means that property and market relations are not the main shapers of social inequalities, that other than class causal complexes and principles of distribution predominate. The latter means that class formation – social articulation of distinctive class strata and groupings – is relatively weak or does not occur. Social hierarchies divisions and

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[6] The emergence of corporate elites and the subordinate operatives, the "white collar" strata, has been analysed in by Raalf Dahrendorf (1959), C.Wright Mills (1956, 1958) and contemporary elite theorists.

conflicts grow predominantly along non-class (status and/or command) lines. This is the latter one to which we now turn.

Social formation

Social stratification refers to structured social inequality, that is persisting clusters of unequal positions linked by social proximities and separated by social distances. It also refers to processes of social clustering and closure, that is formation, reproduction and re-formation of patterned inequalities. A fair distance – metaphorically speaking – separates social inequality from social stratification, group formation and collective action. The latter are contingent possibilities. Moreover, stratification and group formation have to be seen as accomplishments – results of social cultivation and reproduction by interested social actors. This also means that they are reversible; changing inequality patterns involve de-stratification and re-stratification.

(i)   Social clustering and closure

In the process of stratification social inequalities acquire a shape of stable social hierarchies, patterned relations of superiority and inferiority, systematic inclusions and exclusions. While this is a matter of degree, stratification "proper" emerges only when there is a minimal social formation, that is relatively stable vertical patterning through clustering and closure. It makes little sense to talk about stratified society in the absence of vertical patterning. Social clustering involves an overlap between different aspects of inequality in a way that facilitates social recognition; closure involves the formation of persisting social distances and proximities. Thus class stratification, especially in Britain in the late 19th century, involved what we may call "status usurpation" (and degradation), that is an overlap and convergence of certain class and traditional status positions. A merger through intermarriages of industrial bourgeoisie and landed gentry was but one example of this convergence; status degradation of industrial workers was another.

Social clustering and closure may occur on the matrix of communal status relations, or on the combined matrices of market/property, status and authority. Thus one may argue that the occupational clustering involves convergence of market endowments, status positions (in the case of professions increasingly linked with education) and command positions. Their distinctiveness depends on the degree of social closure and capacity for reproduction across generations – the sociodemographic closure. The best markers of closure are intermarriages and intergenerational occupational continuity. Intermarriages within the sets of socially recognized class positions, status positions and/or command positions is a key factor of strata reproduction. Such reproduction is facilitated by a formation of sociocultural habituses through which social backgrounds affect education and career trajectories.

Attention of stratification sociologists tends to focus on "social classes", that is strata formed principally on the matrix of property and market relations and involving clusters of proxy class positions.[7] Class marriages and mobility have been well researched in the sociological literature. Less popular are studies of strata formation on the matrices of status and command, that is communal and authority relations. Analogous to social classes, but formed on the matrix of different positions of inequality, status and command strata have been important elements of stratification systems (see Turner 1988). Racial and ethno-strata (eg. Black strata in the US, Chinese in East Asia, Aborigines in Australia) are examples of well-articulated contemporary status strata. The post-Stalinist decades in Soviet-type societies resulted in a formation of social ranks (Scott calls them "blocs"), that is well-articulated strata formed on the matrix of authority relations. The top partocratic strata, sometimes ironically la-

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[7] It must be remembered, though, that status elements also enter social class formation. What makes the resulting groupings social classes is the original matrix on which they grow or, to put it differently, the social bases of inclusion-exclusion, as well as (though more difficult to determine) the type of motivations and interests involved – in the case of social class, predominantly "class interest".

belled "red aristocracies," and the politically circumscribed *nomenklatu-ras* are good examples of social command strata.

An interesting argument has been developed by contemporary students of "occupational class" (eg. Grusky 2001). They follow the central tenets of Durkheimian sociology on progressive occupational differentiation and social organization (while abandoning the assumption of functional inte-gration). Occupational differentiation, they argue, erodes large-scale class collectivities and status groups. Social formation tends to follow occupa-tional specialization because occupations are easily institutionalised, and become not only legitimate conduits for distribution of resources, but also meaningful entities around which social identities and solidarities are easily build. The result of this process is an increasingly complex stratifi-cation of occupational groupings competing for resources and maintaining (with varying degree of success) internal solidarity.

While the argument concerning occupational fragmentation is well made, one may question the wisdom of calling occupations "classes". Occupa-tional groupings, as both the Marxist and Weberian scholars note, reflect shared working conditions (the technical division of labour) and success-ful – often credentialized - closure. This makes them quite distinct from market and property-based classes. To the extent they reflect the fusion off market, status and authority relations and principles, they may be considered as hybridized positions and groupings.

(ii) Hierarchical communities and actors
Untill now we have discussed the first aspect of social formation, namely clustering and closure. Both are a matter of degree. They result in what Robert Holton (1996) and Bryan Turner (1996), following the classical Toennis' distinction, call *gesellschaftlich* social entities: class, status and command strata-categories. Stronger social formation involves sociocul-tural articulation: development of collective identity, and political articula-tion through organization. I refer to the outcome of such processes as "groupness" or community. When strata attain such groupness – and this is a rare and contingent occurrence – they become *gemeinschaftlich*, that

is form social communities with high degree of consciousness and solidarity. With progressing organization and leadership, such communal groupings may form, or spawn, collective actors, typically parties or movements.

The Durkheimian perspective stresses the importance of in- out-group solidarities and distances, and the accompanying processes of social evaluations ("distance from the sacred") (eg. Lockwood 1992). This path of analysis points to three inter-related aspects of stratification process: classification and boundary drawing, evaluation cum granting/claiming of social esteem which reflect the negotiated "distance from the sacred", and internal cohesion-building. The latter involves setting of collective representations, identities and normative regulation. Vertical ordering is played down in Durkheimian sociology. Communities may, or may not, form hierarchical orders; even if they do, the resulting hierarchies are always contested and precarious. The interplay of social differentiation and stratification, mainly along the occupational lines, is the favourite topic of students of social solidarities.[8]

The Weberian perspective invites us to see the formation of vertical communities and collective actors as contingent and complex, implicated

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[8] As noted above, for Durkheim (eg. 1933:356-8) and his followers the relentless division of labour generates *occupational* differentiation and stratification. This may result in "social class divisions" when differentiation combines with "pathological" in Durkheim's view social separation and isolation, when social "division becomes dispersion" and when normative regulation fails. Formation of "working classes" (in plural) and industrial conflict with the employers are symptomatic of these divisions in the large-scale industry. However, Durkheim also sees a tendency towards normatively regulated occupational differentiation and integration, especially in the climate of spreading "cult of individual" and highly differentiated "conscience collective" (pluralism of values). The resulting pattern of occupational stratification, as pointed out by Parsons, is highly fluid, complex and diverse. Strata formation follows societal and local "evaluative frameworks", hence operating according to status, rather than class, principle.

in the systematic patterns of domination/subordination. It highlights the two-sided aspects of social formation and the resulting asymmetries of power. Stratified communities – be it class, status-occupational or command - are best seen as patterned "from below", so to speak, by mass orientations and interests (material and ideal), and formatted "from above" by elites and political organizations. Patterning "from below" involves articulation of structural cleavages (power grids) and the formation of dominant ideological orientations and predispositions. Formatting "from above" involves elites and organizational apparatuses shaping identities and action. Political leaders and party machines organize constituencies through articulation of and appeals to common interests and loyalties. They may use a predominantly class idiom of appeal – mobilize interests and solidarities engendered in market locations – or a predominantly status idiom or a predominantly command idiom. Appeals to racial exclusion and discrimination (as in the case of the civil rights and minority movements), or to shared disenfranchisement and political exclusion (as in the case of Solidarity-type movements in Eastern Europe) illustrate such non-class elite formatting. This elite/ organizational formatting may be so strong and pervasive that it may become the dominant mechanism of social group formation. Typically, however, structuring occurs in a two-way fashion. If a symmetry is achieved, a lasting pattern emerges whereby mass cleavages converge with organizational divisions, orientations, ideological constructs and political action.

The social patterning has deep historical roots. As Lipset and Rokkan (1967) remind us, the dominant sociopolitical cleavages in the West originated in the Industrial Revolution and were further shaped in the modernization processes. The Industrial Revolution generated strong class (owner – worker) as well as sectoral (agricultural - industrial) cleavages. The organizational formatting of the class cleavage in Europe occurred at the beginning of the 20th century, and it was accomplished by elites that effectively used class idiom of appeal. These elites, and the organizations they headed, had "coupled" with and, in fact, *organized* class constituencies. They defined and appealed to common "class interests", addressed large occupational categories, focused debates on issues of work and

production, stressed the social implications of economic issues, and linked their programs with ideological packages that reflected the left-right polarity.[9] While this formatting proved very successful in generating "working class" movements, parties and action, it has to be stressed that elites engaged in class formatting have always competed with elites using alternative idioms of mobilization and unity: national, regional, religious and ethnic. These alternative idioms, like the class one, were reinforced by social cleavage, and they proved equally successful in generating hierarchical communities.

Class analysts tend to isolate the historically specific process of class cleavage formation and class formatting process. This results in privileging only one aspect of structural patterning (class), and in the tendency either to ignore social formatting or to see it as epiphenomenal. The sociological perspective embraced here, by contrast, locates community formation and collective action within a broader field of power grids and historical trajectories. It admits and models non-class patterning of social cleavage, and it explicitly recognizes the importance of elite and organizational formatting in shaping collective interests, identities, solidarities and action. Communal action and politics in general may be weakly patterned, and/or formatted in the way that makes class analysis superfluous. Mobilization of such action may, or may not, involve articulation of new social classes and/or changes in class organizations. In fact, both Weberians and some neo-Marxists see contemporary politics as an increasingly autonomous sphere, where organization and leadership skills play a dominant role in formatting patterns of inequality, division and conflict.

As argued elsewhere (eg. Crook et al. 1992), the state has been strongly implicated in the processes of social-political group formation. On the most obvious level, state agencies have promoted the formation of national communities (and, typically, control cum suppression of sub-national identities and divisions). This involves celebration of cultural commonal-

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[9] See Clark's (2001) model. Sartori (1969), together with elite theorists, emphasizes a process of structuring from above.

ities and promotion of "imagined communities." Liberal nation-states also promote and safeguard citizenship – an egalitarian status extending to all state members, thus reinforcing national integration. Similarly, states "organize" major classes and control class conflict. On the ideological and political level, this control has taken the form of corporatist regulation. Political formatting and corporatist regulation by state elites shaped the process of class formation in Europe throughout the mid-20th century.

Thus stratification, as seen here, is a matter of form and degree. In a minimal sense, it implies a formation of *gesellschaftlich* social strata through vertical clustering and closure. Inter-generational persistence and transmission of these strata is associated also with their social recognition and the spread of norms regulating social distances and proximities. As stressed here, this is an ongoing and reversible process; cross-cutting of inequalities combined with the erosion of social distances and mobility barriers mark de-stratification. In a stronger sense, social formation may lead to the emergence of stratified (vertically patterned) communal group-ings – the processes associated with the formation of collective identities, solidarities and political organization. If social strata (or their segments) display such communal groupness, they may also form, or spawn, social actors. Re-stratification involves reverse processes: social clustering, closure, identification and organization. De-stratification and re-stratification typically coincide; old patterns and configurations give way to new ones.

General patterns of inequality – a typology

One can assume a minimum degree of social formation below which one talks about mere social inequality, rather than social stratification proper. While such boundary judgements are necessarily arbitrary, a typological distinction between inequality and stratification is extremely useful. It allows for charting social trends of destratification vs restratification. Such trends, and the resulting configurations, have been discussed by Emil Durkheim and Max Weber, and more recently by Stanislaw Os-sowski (1963: 89-118) and Dennis Wrong (1964: 5-16) mainly in the

context of analysis of patterns of social inequality in the US. They coined the terms "non-egalitarian classlessness," "inequality without stratification" and "classless inequality," and argued that social inequalities may take an unstratified form. Such form may result from weak social formation, as well as social destratification whereby pre-existent social strata and/or classes fragment and dwindle.

As stressed above, social formation occurs on the matrices of property/market, communal and authority relations. In a class society, where class formation is strong, one observes not only the dominance of property/market inequalities, but also the articulation of real class strata and groupings, with commonalities rather than mere alikeness. They may also develop a collective class identity, solidarity and, possibly, class organization. To the degree that it happens, class analysis is relevant and central in making sense of social inequality, division and conflict.

Pre-modern estates ("social orders") in Europe are good examples of such non-class stratification, so were the racial strata in the United States and South Africa. The sociopolitical inequality under state socialism also resulted in a degree of rank stratification, especially the emergence of the elite (top party-state officials) and the *nomenklatura* stratum. As argued below, also occupational stratification in industrialised societies, especially when accompanied by credentialization, also should be considered as non-class stratification.

Thus the general pattern of stratification is a matter of the relative salience of sources of inequality and the relative strength of social formation. This applies to advanced societies with both capitalist and non-capitalist (mixed) economies. While property and market relations in such societies may be ubiquitous, they may be overshadowed in their relative salience by sociocultural conventions or sociopolitical command structures. In such case, the accompanying dominant principles of resource allocation that shape the distribution of lifechances are of a non-class nature.

In line with these distinctions, we propose a typology of general configurations of social inequality. It results from cross-cutting of the two dimensions discussed above. The first concerns the degree of predominance of one type of causality and the concomitant principle of resource allocation (system of inequality): dominant inequality system is contrasted with mixed/ hybrid system. This coincides with the degree of complexity: low when there is one predominant matrix of inequality (eg. class), and high when no single system-matrix predominates and hybridization occurs. The second dimension concerns the strength/degree of hierarchical social formation which we dichotomised into high/strong vs low/weak. The cross-cutting of these two results in four types: dominant stratification, dominant inequality, hybrid stratification and complex inequality (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Configurations of inequality – a typology

	Social formation (stratification)	
	High/Strong	*Low/Weak*
Predominance & complexity of inequality		
One dominant system *Low complexity*	dominant stratification (eg. class society)	dominant inequality
Mixed/hybrid systems *High complexity*	hybrid stratification	complex inequality (classless inequality)

Class society refers to a sub-type of dominant stratification. In such a society predominant property/market-generated inequalities combine with high degree of class formation, high degree of groupness. Unequal lifechances of individuals reflect principally their market endowments; lifechances of family/household members reflect the market endowments

of the head, that is, the position in the property/market relations. These relations, typically engendered in employment position, form the main generator and matrix of social inequalities – class inequalities. The pattern of distribution of major resources and lifechances follows these class inequalities and overshadows other inequalities. Inequalities – uneven access to economic resources (money), honour and influence – follow class position (i.e. the location in the system of production), rather than any other aspect of social location and pattern of social relations. Social classes form around class inequalities. Social distances and divisions crystallise along class lines; class awareness and identity are widespread. When formation is strong, this awareness and identity are reflected in organization, solidary and action. This type follows closely the model promoted by Marxist class analysts, and it was approximated by West European societies in the late 19th and the first half of the 20th century.

Dominant social inequality is characterised by a dominance of one system-matrix of inequality and weak social formation. One may argue that this type of inequality characterises periods of rapid social change and transition. Early 19th century Western capitalism, Marx and Engels argued, approximated this type, at least as far as the articulation of the "major classes" was concerned. While status principles of distribution weakened and class inequalities started to overshadow the estate system, class formation was embryonic and ("classes in themselves" predominated).

Complex social inequality and hybrid stratification refer to configurations in which no single system of inequality predominates. Instead, the three dimensions coexist and merge into hybrid forms. Lifechances form around complex profiles combining class, status and command positions. Gendered occupational strata and market segments, as well as racial and ethno-specific "underclasses" are good examples of such hierarchical social clusters. If social formation occurs, strata develop around the complex combinations of positions; social identities form around them. In order to label such strata with a degree of accuracy, one needs multiple descriptors, such as unskilled migrant women, white-collar urban Blacks,

or Catholic intelligentsia. By contrast, any single descriptor, such as working class or professionals, refers to a nominal category.

One may object that such a typology is loaded, that is makes dominant stratification type (including class society) less realistic, less likely than other types to be approximated by reality. After all, objectors may say, there has been no case of a "pure" class society; class inequalities and divisions have always coincided with divisions generated by communal and state-authoritarian relations. Such an argument would miss the point. Class stratification and division *are* admitted here as realistic possibilities. There are social configurations that approximate closely class inequality and class society. In fact, I argue below that such close approximations formed in Western Europe at the turn of the century, and they persisted throughout the world wars and post-war decades, reproduced mainly through sociopolitical formatting in the context of corporatist deals. In a similar way, one may argue that the type of inequality found in, say, the 18th century Poland – with well socially articulated and politically organised estates – approximated closely the estate (status type) stratification, and that the stratification system in, say, Maoist China showed strong affinities to partocratic ranking.

Perhaps the most controversial claim is that social inequalities in contemporary advanced societies increasingly approximate the fourth type in Figure 2, that is complex ("classless") inequality. This would mean that social inequalities in such societies increasingly form on multiple matrices (of market, communal and authority relations) and that the processes of social formation are weak, thus resulting in multiple, continuous and cross cutting hierarchies, and motleys of weakly articulated, fickle groupings. The hierarchies may be steep – and I argue below that they are steepening – but less stable and discrete. This is captured by the concept of conventional status hierarchy, and by the propositions of *fragmentation* and *contingency* formulated elsewhere (Pakulski and Waters 1996). Conventional statuses consist of a potentially infinite overlap of associations and identifications that are shifting and unstable. Status-conventional inequalities are built on multiple matrices and result in fragile formations that

multiply and fluctuate in strength. The clustering and closure are weakened due to progressive differentiation and normative pluralism. The subjective orientation and behaviour of any individual or aggregate of individuals is very difficult to predict by virtue of hierarchical location. There are cross-cutting and competing solidarities and collective identities formed and adopted in an increasingly reflexive and purposeful manner. Moreover there is no central cleavage or single dimension along which social attributes and political preferences can be ordered, no "master" principle of allocation. Such attributes as lifestyle, political preference, access to education, patterns of marriage and income are self-referential and politically organised (formatted from above) rather than structurally constrained (patterned from below).

This type has to be seen in a historical context of destratification and weakening class division, which is the theme to which we now turn.

Modern trends – a short history of class

This helps in putting in perspective the processes of social stratification, and especially class formation, class struggle and class politics in Western Europe throughout the late19[th] and the first half of the 20th century. Such processes, especially working class formation, as hinted by Weber and Durkheim, were historically contingent. They reflected rather unique coincidence of spacial concentration on factory floors of industrial cities; good communication (printed pamphlets and popular press); frequent contact with, and a clear vision of, the "class enemy" (owners-managers); and above all ideological and political leadership exercised by the activists of socialist movements. These leaders and activists successfully convinced large sections of these manual (mainly industrial) workers that they form a class: share economic and political interests and should embark on the proposed programs of radical social reconstruction. Working class consciousness, solidarity and identity were, to a large extent, political accomplishments. They reflected the class cleavage, and formed on the matrix of employment relations, shared working conditions and territorial proximities. Even at the time when functional, occupational and lifestyle

differentiation eroded the underlying commonalities of working conditions and lifestyles, class unity and identity could be maintained through political organization and renewed ideological appeals. To paraphrase Pizzorno, it was the politically instilled class identity that enabled the leaders to define – and effectively appeal to – the shared class interest. This political and ideological foundation of class was recognized even by the most radical wing of the working class movement, the Bolsheviks. For Vladimir Lenin and Georg Lukacs it was the party – more precisely its leadership – that truly represented working class and its interests.

Working class formation was also seen as unique and contingent by Emile Durkheim. The internal cohesion (solidarity) of "working classes" was of a mechanical nature – the result of shared ideological visions and political programs. The social articulation of class division and conflict reflected anomic social distantiation when difference becomes division. Both make class unstable. Progressive functional differentiation erodes commonalities of work and interests; progressive individualism erodes the underlying moral and ideological formulas. The processes of social change, combined with social engineering (normative regulation, sponsored by the occupational groups, educational system, state activities and civic religions) should spell the end of class divisions. While erring on the fragility of classes, Durkheim, nevertheless, rightly identified the importance of moral, ideological and political foundations of "working classes", he correctly predicted the importance of occupational differentiation in eroding class unity, and he correctly identified citizenship and nationalism as ideological contenders to the class idiom.

These points need further highlighting. The processes of occupational differentiation, credentialization, and the gradual absorption of racial minorities and women into the labour force, have continued to undermine class formation already in the second quarter of the 20th century. So did the extension of citizenship rights. The life of social classes was prolonged mainly by ideology and political organization. The persistence of Left-Right ideological division and organized class politics by class parties formed a lifeline for class formation at the time of rapid differentiation of

working conditions and lifestyles. Liberal corporatism facilitated this sociopolitical perpetuation of classes by sponsoring class parties and class politics (the "democratic class struggle" and corporatist deals). Paradoxically, it also blunted class conflicts by their institutional regulation (Dahrendorf 1959. Class conflicts transformed into legalized rituals of national collective negotiations and bargaining. Such etatized and politically organized classes survived until the wave of deregulation and new politics in the 1970s.

The view of classes as ideologically and politically organized entities, as elite accomplishments, communal groupings formatted from above, may sound to any class theorist's ears like a heresy. Yet, such a perspective proves useful in explaining the sequential diagnoses of class decomposition (Dahrendorf), fragmentation (Lipset), and waning class politics (Clark). Seen from such a perspective, class formation fell a victim of, first, occupational differentiation and market fragmentation, then of the unravelling corporatist deals, and finally of the declining state regulation and the accompanying weakening of class elites, organizations and ideologies. The latter followed the withering away of corporatism and the advancement of globalization. These processes of historical formation and decomposition of class society can be summarised in three stages:

I. Early modern industrializing societies (liberal capitalism) – class divisions form on the matrix of market and property relations that gain structural prominence. Social class divisions combine and overlap with status divisions thus enhancing social class formation. Social and political formation is strongest at both ends of the social/power spectrum: manual working class and industrial bourgeoisie. Liberal ideology (emphasizing equality of opportunity) and political citizenship erode estate divisions. This marks a transition from estate to socioeconomic inequality and class stratification.

II. Modern industrial societies (organized capitalism) – class divisions organized socially and politically. Bureaucratic and professional hierarchies combine and overlap with class divisions. Nationally organized

inequalities are managed by the states in the context of corporatist deals. Industrial development and urbanization facilitate the social articulation of middle classes. Progressive occupational differentiation, credentialization and market segmentation leads to fragmentation of the major classes. This heralds a transition from class stratification to hybrid stratification.

III. Late-/Post- modern, post-industrial societies (disorganized capitalism) – decomposition of classes in "reverse order": declining class organization, identity, social cohesion, etc. Collapse of corporatist deals, globalization, intense social differentiation (along occupation, lifestyle and taste), and extension of citizenship prompt class decomposition and destratification. Conventional status inequalities and fickle social formation result in a status bazaar. This heralds a transition from hybrid stratification to complex (classless) inequality.

A shift from industrial to late industrial stage coincided with a decomposition of the "major", that is most organized classes, and the emergence of hybridised stratification. The latter was better captured by composite occupational and authority classifications, such as proposed by Goldthorpe and Giddens, than by the classic class schemes. The economic sources of hybrid stratification included: a complex division of labour with the concomitant requirements of prolonged education and training; market segmentation with the concomitant fusions of market and status inequalities; and economic organization and concentration with the concomitant formation of corporate hierarchies and fusions of status, market and command positions. The sociocultural sources included the fusion of race, ethnicity and gender divisions with the process of market and occupational segmentation.

The hybridised strata and occupational groupings, like classes, presuppose market capitalism, but they also reflect "social and political adjustments" of the market resulting from sociocultural divisions, corporate organization and the operation of the state. These adjustments, seen as the essential features of "modern trends", helped to alleviate social and economic inequalities emerging in the process of industrialization. It is there-

fore not surprising that the decomposition of classes, especially the working class, as a social formation has coincided with the increasing economic inequalities. The working class organizations and the corporatist state regulated and controlled economic inequalities. With the withering away of both, socioeconomic hierarchies become wider and steeper.

Postmodern trends: towards complex inequalities

The shift to late- (post-) modern stage marks a gradual change in the form of social inequalities. The processes of social formation are impeded by the ongoing and intensified commodification, rationalization and social differentiation on the global scale (for details see Crook et al. 1992). If we adopt a geological analogy (which underlies stratification imagery), the postmodernization constitutes an earthquake destroying the formerly clustered and layered geological formations. The very notion of stratification, I would like to argue, has to be critically reviewed in order to adjust the imagery and concepts to the complex and steep, yet less socially structured and nationally organized, social inequalities.

Let me summarise briefly the major aspects of this late-/post- modern shift. It is driven mainly by the social differentiation, which is functional, social and moral in its nature.[10] Differentiation involves not only the

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[10] The logic of these processes has been the centerpiece of social analysis from Emile Durkheim to Pierre Bourdieu. The novel elements include: • Flexible specialization that erodes consistency of occupational tasks and homogeneity of occupational categories. Proliferation of roles requiring flexibility and adaptability. Increasing scope of flexible employment. • Extending scope and diversity of market transactions due to the tendency to extend commodity status to new aspects of human products and activities (eg. brands, software, genetic materials). Access to information, signs and symbols become important aspect of lifechances. • Proliferation of horizontal networks within and across the bureaucratic corporate hierarchies. Declining clarity of hierarchical relations. • Growing density of social relations facilitated by widening access to new communication and information technologies. • Increasing consumption,

specialisation of functions, appearance of new distinctions and formation of new boundaries, but also an increasing transparency of this process, increasing reflexivity and awareness of a conventional and social character of the boundary-(re)forming processes. This transparency strips the process of social differentiation of its "naturalness" and makes the centrally organized social reproduction of distinctions and boundaries difficult. Consequently, they become localised and fickle, and their persistence depends on reinforcement through organization. Since the latter is expensive (in the economic and social sense), social formation is impeded. New status conventions generated in the process of differentiation lack permanency; norms are contested and boundaries are mobile and porous. As Pierre Bourdieu notes, the boundaries of contemporary classes (which he conflates with status groupings) are like flickering flames.

Continuous and intense differentiation undermines existing social formations. Fragmentation and specialisation of tasks is accompanied by their reassembly, especially in the high-tech manufacturing and service sectors, in the form of "flexibly specialized" task groups (eg. Piore and Sabel 1984). One consequence of this flexible specialization is further blurring of functional roles, and further fragmentation of occupational categories and careers. Discontinuous and lateral job moves, experienced by increasing proportion of service workers, are also associated with differentiation of rewards and working conditions. Qualitative factors (work environment, flexible hours, ecological safety, exposure to stress, etc.) become important considerations, thus entering the increasingly complex – themselves differentiated – criteria of evaluation. With multiple market fragmentation the notion of a general occupational status hierarchy becomes highly problematic. Social differentiation blurs social stratification.

The effects of social differentiation are amplified by the centrality of consumption. The growing level of affluence means reduction in working time and increase in the time spent consuming. It also extends conspicuous

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especially of symbols and services. Proliferation of lifestyles and social identities related to consumption styles and tastes.

consumption across the socioeconomic hierarchy. Moreover, as pointed out by Jean Baudrillard (1988), this consumption becomes increasingly symbolic, and increasingly implicated in the processes of social ordering. The classifications that encode behaviour and form matrices of group formation are increasingly detached from production relations, material needs and interests. Consumer objects, increasingly semantic in their nature, start to operate as autonomous social-structuring systems. Such structuring contributes to social differentiation rather than stratification – sumptuary activities do not lend themselves easily to consensual evaluations - and results in weak and fickle formations.

The obverse of social differentiation is progressive individualism. Durkheim linked its spread with the division of labour and the associated new form of "organic" social cohesion that favours complementary difference over alikeness. Simmel provided a more convincing account of individualism that stressed the importance of cross-cutting and progressively voluntary group membership, and the accompanying complexity of social relations in the context of urban-metropolitan life. Unique patterns of group membership are reflected in highly individualised selves. When elevated by liberal ideology to a status of social "meta-principle", individualism undermines further collectivistic projects, thus hindering strong social formation. Weak and transient ties predominate. Achieving and cultivating group solidarities – other than short term and defensive – becomes difficult. On the other hand, individualism promotes the formation of weak tie-based temporary associations, stylised quasi-groupings, typical of the fashion industry. These, however, are more aspects of social differentiation than stratification, because of the diversity of values and paucity of norms.

This paucity affects all moral-normative constructs. The process of differentiation affects the patterns of communal relations by increasing pluralism of values and lifestyles. Increased interpenetration of value system accompanying the globalization process (increased circulation of capital, goods, information and people across state boundaries) aides this process. Status standards and the underlying value systems are thus increasingly

complex and exposed to challenges – thus unable to sustain stable hierarchies. The old status groupings are either waning or fragmenting – any closures and systematic exclusions are likely to be questioned. If new status communities are formed, their position requires constant negotiated maintenance. Consequently, the status group formation is impeded. Weak, tentative and localised formations predominate.

The extension of citizenship into "social" (welfare) rights has been arrested (for reasons discussed elsewhere). However, the proliferation of demands for rights has continued, mainly in the sociocultural-symbolic areas - as rights to dignified, non-stigmatising representation. That means, again, that the systems of social distances and discriminations that underlie status group formation are increasingly difficult to legitimate and maintain. Racial, ethnic, age, gender, etc. forms of discrimination are challenged on the symbolic level – they are questioned even as terminological distinctions, let alone actual social discriminations. They still structure relationships and social distances, but – when no longer upheld by religion, law, morality popular ideology, and even politically correct linguistic conventions - in a hidden and localised way. Liberal citizenship, in other words, hinders status stratification, though status inequalities persist.

Mass democratization operates in a similar manner. It takes a plebiscitary turn. The erosion of organized *Volksparteien*, including mass-class parties, and the burgeoning sphere of new politics, break the corporatist constraints on political articulation and organization. This further undermines political class formation. As Terrence Clark and Martin Lipset show, patterns of political association detach themselves from social cleavages, as well as from the old ideological packages of Left and Right which had developed in the context of the "democratic class struggle." The "new political culture" is conducive to political fragmentation and short-term alliances; it reflects "issue-politics" and responds to protest movement mobilizations rather than organised and class cleavage-based interest politics.

Conclusions

Scarcity of resources and social inequality are ubiquitous. So are social hierarchies, as well as social divisions and conflicts. The class idiom coined by Marx provided a potent key to making sense of both. Class theory and analysis has served as an explanatory tool, as well as an ideological device for condemning class division, domination and exploitation, and as a formula for mobilizing the downtrodden to challenge the capitalist order. Class theory derived from Marxism had difficulty in maintaining this excessively broad function, and in safeguarding the unity of ideological purpose. Time proved unkind for its key tenets - subsequent social developments contradicted the core predictions, and the practices of communist regimes gave it a bad name. Its contemporary versions became more modest in scope, more analytic in form and less partisan-ideological in the sense of attachment to the "emancipatory" projects of the Left. Some proponents of analytic and value neutral class analysis, like John Goldthorpe and his collaborators, have severed almost completely the links with the Marxist heritage.

Thus the meanings of class, class theory and class analysis vary widely. This is one reason for which the label "anti-class analysis" (reluctantly accepted here) is vague and even confusing. This is because the analytic model proposed here does not reject the concept of class, but particularises it, restricts its meaning and circumscribes its analytic deployment. Classes are recognised as important social entities - as central elements of stratification and division in industrial societies of Europe. Class analysis, it is argued, makes sense when applied to such class societies. This is the central plank of the particularisation strategy proposed here. It allows for preserving the integrity of the Marxist class concept and theory by circumscribing their meaning and sociohistorical universe of discourse, by restricting the scope of their applicability and relevance. In many ways, this is very much in line with the historicity of the original Marxist pro-

ject, as well as analytic strategies proposed by critics of Marxism, including Max Weber and his contemporary followers.

For these reasons a label "social analysis" is more accurate, and it is a preferred self-description for the approach proposed here. Social analysis of inequality forms an alternative to class analysis, especially of the "classic" Marxist type. Unlike the latter, it broadens the notion of generative structures, relativises their efficacy, and separates more clearly the issue of inequality from the issue of social formation. This, in turn, allows for tackling a broader variety of social inequalities and their historical patterns without risky reductions, conceptual stretches and conflations. Terms such as class inequality, division, stratification and class society thus gain a more precise, though more restricted, meaning. Social analysis lifts the assumptions of centrality of class relations, inevitability of social formation on the matrix of class relations, and the inevitably exploitative nature of these relations. In short, it rejects the implied assumption of natural overlap between patterns of social inequality, division and conflict. This helps it to gain more flexibility in charting the patterns of solidarity and division, community and conflict in contemporary advanced societies.

Underlying social analysis is a vision of social-historical change and the accompanying shifts in the social configurations of inequality. Its key elements, presented here in a cursory fashion, are derived from the classic sociological sources, mainly the Weberian, Durkheimian and Tocquevillian traditions. In updating these traditions, I step in the same general direction as contemporary Marxist and Weberian class analysts – but in a more radical manner. Thus we share the view that structures of inequality are more complex, and less amenable to analysis using the polar class models; and we also agree that social formation is complex and contingent. From these shared observations, however, we draw quite different conclusions. The acknowledgement of growing complexity has prompted Marxist scholars to update and generalize class idiom; they extend the meaning of class, adjust "class maps" in a way that reflex growing complexity, and they juxtapose class, gender and race analyses (eg, Wright 1997). It has pushed Weberian scholars into building "synthetic" – and

increasingly syncretic - maps of "social class", embracing the "weak" (*gesellschaftlich*) idiom of class, and acknowledging the limitations of thus reformulated modest class analysis (eg. Goldthorpe and Marshall 1992). Proposed here is a bolder paradigmatic shift away from class analysis and towards a more inclusive social analysis of inequality. It particularises class, extends the range of concepts used in the analysis of structured inequality, and takes on board the complexity of contemporary inequalities by contrasting class stratification with hybrid stratification and complex ("classless") inequality. The latter configurations, as argued here, are progressively approximated by inequalities in advanced societies. While advanced modernization is accompanied by hybridization of social inequalities, the post-modern trends, especially social differentiation and globalization, promote de-stratification, weakening of hierarchical social formation, and the emergence of a complex web of steep but fluid inequalities. To the degree that such a configuration predominates, class is dead.

These formulations are, in principle, translatable into testable propositions. While they pose the inevitable problems of operationalization and boundary judgements (inherent in the deployment of ideal types), they nevertheless open the way for a more robust adjudication of the "death of class" debate. "Open the way" is a consciously chosen cautious phrase. I am mindful of the fact that what is proposed here is a change in paradigmatic images and vocabularies. And, as Kuhn (1970) reminds us, this is fraught with difficulties. Class may be dead, but the class idiom and imagery have acquired lives of their own. The class paradigm - entrenched in popular images and terminologies, encoded in textbooks and intellectual routines - dies hard. Its defenders respond to criticisms through continuous updates and adjustments. If it dies, this will happen by exhaustion rather than falsification, by academic communities and informed publics losing interest in it. And that will happen only when the alternatives are well articulated and gain widespread legitimacy.

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