

## ***CHAPTER 6***

### ***FOUNDATIONS OF A POST-CLASS ANALYSIS***

**BY JAN PAKULSKI**

---

Contemporary class theories and analyses are grandchildren of Marxism. As noted by Wright in the Introduction, they share with their classic antecedent a broad explanatory aspiration. They aim at charting and explaining the structure of inequality, especially in economically defined lifechances, by linking these inequalities with the patterns of property and employment relations. They also aim at identifying key conflict-generating economic cleavages, especially those that underlie transformative social struggles. In doing that, they combine and compete with a number of alternatives - that is non-class - analytic and theoretical constructs. The latter include concepts and propositions derived from the Tocquevillian, Durkheimian and Weberian theoretical heritage: occupational theories of stratification that focus on social division of labour and occupational closure; “status” theories of inequality identifying value-conventional sources of racial, gender and ethno-national inequality and conflict; and theories concentrating on political power, organizational hierarchies of authority and the accompanying social tensions and struggles. This competition is complicated by partial convergence between the competitors. As the preceding chapters show, the classic Marxist heritage has undergone a number of reformulations that blur the boundaries between the original analytic distinctions of class, occupation, status and political power. Therefore any rendition of an analytic and theoretical confrontation between class and non-class accounts of social inequality, division and conflict has to rely on some – often contested – definitional distinctions. It is assumed here that class is a fundamentally economic phenomenon, that it is reflected in patterns of social “groupness”, that class location is reflected in social consciousness, identity and antagonism, and that it generates forms of action in economic and political field that have a potential to transform capitalism.

Thus defined class theory and analysis face two major problems: that of validity, that is the degree of empirical confirmation of their key tenets, and that of relevance, that is capacity to highlight the most salient features of contemporary social hierarchy, division and conflict. On both counts, especially that of relevance, class theory and class analysis face criticism.<sup>1</sup> According to critics, their capacity to highlight the key aspects of social hierarchy, division and conflict has been declining. This is because “class formation”, especially the social and political articulation of working classes, is in decline. Other aspects of social inequality and antagonism come to the fore, reflecting the divisions of race and gender, the impact of citizenship, the distribution of political power, and the actions of elites.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, and in contrast with its classic predecessor, contemporary class analysis becomes an abstract academic pursuit that is insulated from political practices of social movements and parties.

The defenders of class analysis argue – in many ways convincingly – that the classic class models need updating and elaboration. The foundations of such updated class theory and analysis as proposed by Erik Wright, Richard Breen, David Grusky and Aage Sorensen, show the great theoretical and analytic potential of class constructs. Yet, their authors also face a series of dilemmas. First, there is a dilemma of identity. The more valid and relevant the proposed class constructs, the more similar they become to their close competitors, especially to Weberian and Durkheimian analyses of occupational and status stratification. This analytic-theoretical morphing<sup>3</sup> raises a question whether a “class theory” stripped of its distinctive elements is still worth calling a theory of class. The second is a dilemma of explanatory trade-offs. The more fine-tuned the class theoretical and analytic claims, the less capably they highlight and explain the most salient features of contemporary social hierarchy and antagonism. Hence the frequent “juxtapositions” of updated class analyses with non-class (gender, race, occupational, political, etc.) analyses that raise further questions of the relevance of class constructs. Class theory and analysis, it seems, face dangers of either morphing with their competitors or being improved into oblivion.

The strategy proposed here is quite different from that suggested by the advocates of class. Instead of reconstructing, updating and “developing” class theory and analysis, I suggest absorbing them into a more comprehensive, complex and plural – but less deterministic – theoretical and historical vision of social ordering and change. The first step towards such absorption is a particularisation of class as a historical-analytic concept. This involves locating class within a historical-developmental sequence as a *particular* social configuration of inequality typical of the industrial era. In other words, it is proposed that the “classness” of social inequalities, and therefore the relevance of class analysis, vary historically. As argued in the concluding section, “classness” reached its peak in industrial society and has been declining while postindustrial and postmodern trends intensify. Contemporary advanced societies remain unequal, but in a classless way. These increasingly complex configurations of classless inequality and antagonism, it is argued here, call for more comprehensive theoretical and analytic constructs.<sup>4</sup>

### Aspects of class

While in the popular discourse “class” is a synonym of social hierarchy and structured inequality in general, in social analysis and academic discourse it carries more specific meanings. These meanings - the semantic “halo” of the class concept - typically reflect the central tenets of the “classic template”:

- the centrality of property and employment relations (the class structure) in shaping social inequality, that is, the distribution of societal power and economic lifechances in general, and income in particular;
- the centrality of class structure in shaping other social relations and acting as the matrix for “social structuration”. This implies “class formation”, ie. a

- correspondence between class structure on the one hand, and the pattern social “groupness” on the other; and
- the centrality of class structure in structuring social antagonism and overt conflict. This implies that class conflict and class struggle shape sociopolitical cleavages and remain key propellants of social change.

This characterisation of class raises three questions: about the relative strength of class determination of access to key “power resources” and therefore the relationship between class and social hierarchy; about the relative strength of class formation and therefore the relationship between class and social division; and about the relative salience of class antagonism in shaping social conflicts. Consequently, debates about the relevance of the class concept for the analysis of contemporary advanced societies inevitably address not only the questions concerning the scope of “class inequality” that is, the inequality attributed to the operation of class structure (typically defined by property/employment relations), but also the issue of “class formation” and “class conflict”. Classes are not only structural positions positions, but also real antagonistic collectivities.

How salient and important are class determinations of inequalities vis-à-vis other non-class determinations? How strong are class divisions vis-a- non-class – e.g., occupational, racial, ethno-national - social divisions? How strong and salient are class identities vis-à-vis non-class – e.g., gender, regional, religious – identifications? What are the trends in their relative social and political salience? The advocates of updated class analysis, especially Wright, argue that while class is important, the degree of its social and political salience varies, and it can be modest. Yet, if this salience of class proves not only relatively low but also declining, it would undermine the very rationale of reconstructing and upgrading class theory and analysis. Intellectual investment in alternative accounts would promise better explanatory returns.

Among the most frequently discussed alternatives to class analysis are the “multidimensional” Weberian analyses of stratification, Durkheimian analyses of occupational differentiation, Tocquevillian approaches focussing on civil society, and studies of power stratification and elite formation. While some of them are discussed by Erik Wright, Richard Breen, David Grusky and Elliott Weininger as springboards for updated class analysis, I will argue here that they are more usefully seen as theoretical foundations for *alternative* (to class) accounts of inequality and antagonism in advanced society.

### **Classic foundations of social (non-class) analysis**

Alexis de Tocqueville’s (1862/1945) vision of social inequalities and their modern dynamics is in many ways a mirror image of the Marxist class vision. While Marx diagnosed class polarisation, Tocqueville charted a progressive equalisation of conditions, expansion of democratic practices and proliferation of egalitarian norms and

manners. This progressive equalisation, according to Tocqueville, reflected the cumulative impact of Christian values, expanding commerce and industry, growing affluence, the increasing strength of civil society (civic associations), and the progressive democratisation of culture. Social interaction and mobility, he argued, were becoming frequent and open, ownership became fluid, and property was more equally divided. The new (“democratic”) social order was not only egalitarian but also individualistic. The individual, and not a corporate collectivity, became the centre of initiatives. That fostered progressive individualisation and massification of motives, tastes, concerns and action. Equality and democracy, in other words, promoted “alikehood”, and this quality gave further impetus to social levelling. Under the condition of triumphant republican democracy, predicted Tocqueville, the “passion for equality” would spread through all domains of life and all aspects of human relations, including political, work and domestic spheres.

Contemporary students of social inequality pay special attention to Tocqueville’s analysis of a new form of social hierarchy that grows under republican democracy. Five features of this hierarchy are particularly salient. First, it is flattened, because universal citizenship is reflected not only in mass enfranchisement, but also in the “democracy of manners”. Modern citizens despise haughtiness and question all claims to superiority. Uniformity and informality of manners become habitual among all social strata. This promotes a high level of social mobility – a second feature of the democratic hierarchy. In republican democracy upward social mobility occurs predominantly through economic success, and is widely acclaimed. Success, and its most clear symptom, wealth, are objects of popular admiration. Such perceptions are further strengthened by the levelling of occupational statuses – which is the third feature of republican hierarchy. All professions become open, in a social sense, because most professionals become employees. Caste-like social divisions either weaken or completely disappear. While inequalities of wealth persist, they do not give rise to social distances and divisions. The new rich do not form a new socially elevated and insulated aristocracy, and they do not monopolise political privilege. Wealth and power are formally separated, though corrupt practices such as buying offices and appropriating political spoils are widespread. Fourth, the flattening of hierarchies and narrowing of social distances is reflected in the massification of education and the spread of public information. Schooling is open, education is seen as an important avenue of social advancement, and widespread literacy forms the social foundation for the popular press. This, in turn, fosters a condition of public opinion and informed civic participation. Finally, gender divisions are also affected by the democratic trends: paternalism crumbles, and women gain increasing independence, though matrimony still imposes on them “irrevocable bonds”. This leads Tocqueville to a bold declaration: “I believe that the social changes that bring nearer to the same level the father and son, the master and servant, and, in general, superiors and inferiors will raise woman and make her more and more equal to men.” (1962/1945II:211)

Tocqueville adds two important qualifications to this vision of progressive “equality of condition” (which we may label “classless inequality”). First, he is quite sceptical as to the prospect for racial integration, even if, as he predicts, slavery is eliminated. What is more likely to occur is an informal segregation and antagonism fuelled by the democratic aspirations of the black population. In an even more pessimistic tone, he predicts a persisting segregation of native Americans combined with progressive destruction of their cultures – all done, as he sarcastically notes, with “respect for the laws of humanity”. Second, he is also sceptical about the prospects for equalisation of workmen and the business elite. However, while unequal, neither of them is likely to turn into a cohesive social class. The workers are too atomised to form cohesive collectivities; the business elite is too mobile, internally fragmented due to competition, and too socially heterogeneous to form a cohesive group.<sup>5</sup>

Marxist and Tocquevillian analyses reveal the two faces of modern social hierarchies and offer two paradigmatic views of modern trends. For Marxists, class divisions mark a new form of hierarchical oppression, exploitation and domination that hides behind a façade of “free labour contract”, liberal ideology and egalitarian manners. Marxists are credited with bringing to light these hidden aspects of modern social inequality, and with attributing class inequality to the core features of modern capitalism: private ownership of capital and commodification of labour. The Tocquevillian insights are equally central and profound: in modern society economic inequalities coincide with – and are overshadowed by – the levelling of manners and civic statuses. Republican democracy generates new hierarchies of wealth, but also bridges social gaps created by expanding industrial wealth. The main problem faced by modern society is not class division, but civic division between democratically elected political despots and politically impotent denizens preoccupied with material concerns.<sup>6</sup>

Emile Durkheim (1933) offers another alternative to class analytic and theoretical template. Social inequalities are seen by Durkheim in the context of progressive social differentiation, itself a product of increasing social interactions or “moral density”. The fact that new social functions that emerge in the process of differentiation are organised in a hierarchical manner is less important for Durkheim than the *mode* of this organization. While in traditional societies the social hierarchies are rigid and ideologically justified, in modern societies they are open, and normally enjoy functional legitimacy.

Durkheim made an important distinction between socially acceptable inequalities, namely those which were functional to the industrial order and reflected collective values and ideals, and those that were arbitrarily imposed. In the most general sense, the former reflected the distance from the “sacred”: the ideas, objects and formulas set out as special, forbidden and awe-inspiring. These sacred realms were subsequently identified

with central social values, the universally cherished standards. Social inequalities were socially legitimate if they reflected social values. In modern societies such value-foundation were reflected in references to “merit”: investments, application and efficiency. By contrast, the illegitimate inequalities – and Durkheim included here a broad range of discriminations condemned by socialists and liberals alike – either lacked value-backing or resulted from a “forced division of labour”, a label applied to non-meritocratic hierarchy and privilege.

Social inequalities related to uneven distribution of property were seen by Durkheim as legitimate. Unlike Marx and Weber, Durkheim attributed to property a sacred/religious origin, and he saw the privileges of ownership as legitimated by the residues of property’s sacred status. The legal exclusions that accompanied property rights revealed for Durkheim clear links with ancient taboos and rituals. In a similar way, Durkheim linked gender hierarchies with the sacred realm and ancient popular classifications – symbolic taxonomies that shaped social perceptions and distances, especially between “us” and “them”. Durkheim’s studies of these “primitive classifications” formed a theoretical foundation of the social anthropology of inequality subsequently evoked by Pierre Bourdieu.

In a similar way, Durkheim also argues that political inequalities, especially those related to the roles in the state, carry a strong residue of sacredness as well as functional legitimacy. State leaders carry the residues of sacred authority enjoyed by tribal chieftains and *pater familiae*. At the same time, the special role of the state – as the “brain of society” – necessitates the authority and autonomy of state elites. Political hierarchy, in this view, is reinforced by its functional importance (social coordination) and by the links with the sacred realm. This is why recruitment to these authority positions has to be carried out in a ritualised manner. Incumbents have to prove their fitness for the job by displaying merit and following successfully a prescribed *cursus honorum*.

Durkheim’s second major contribution to sociology of inequality concerns the form and the evolution of occupational hierarchies. Social differentiation (the celebrated “division of labour”) is elevated by Durkheim to the status of the constitutive process of modernisation. It results in the fragmentation of larger social units, such as estates, guilds and classes. In contrast to Marx, Durkheim therefore predicts fragmentation and decomposition of hierarchical collectivities and a multiplication of occupational groups. He also predicts that relationships between occupational groups are likely to be harmonious rather than conflictual, because of increasing regulation of economic contest by occupational associations and the state. Occupational groups become central elements of the new stratification system because they confer identity, status and material rewards. They are aided by the state that becomes a major manager of social stability and cohesion.

Social hierarchy will also be shaped, according to Durkheim, by “value polymorphy” and progressive individualism, the latter reflected in the growing emphasis on individual rights. Nevertheless, he was worried by an apparent clustering of occupational groups into large-scale and potentially conflictual “interest associations”. Such entities did not fit well with modern “organically solidary” societies, because they relied on “mechanical” bonds derived from ideologically constructed “shared interest”. Thus, while recognizing the “unjust advantage” enjoyed by employers, Durkheim considered class formation and polarisation as unlikely. The principle of class solidarity was incompatible with the principle of social differentiation, and the antagonistic ideology of class struggle clashed with the sense of complementarity engendered in organic bonds.<sup>7</sup> Instead of class formation and conflict, Durkheim predicted an ongoing and largely harmonious (though always threatened by anomie) occupational differentiation accompanied by state regulation.

David Grusky (2001:18 and Chapter X above) follows closely Durkheim’s footsteps by proposing that we consider occupations as the basic units of modern social hierarchy. Large-scale class-like entities are nominal and, unlike occupations, they do not form real and meaningful groupings. Occupations are the product of spontaneous differentiation and “organic” social clustering. They form genuine “moral communities” (rather than mere associations) and engender strong identities. Occupations are also recognized and sponsored by the state and implicated in all forms of reward determinations. As well, they serve as conduits for career aspirations and promote similarity of lifestyles, tastes and consumption. Even if they become temporarily aggregated into large-scale classes, such aggregates are fragile.

Grusky’s argument becomes problematic when he suggests that occupations should be considered “real classes”. It is not clear what is gained by conflating the two terms and concepts: that of class and occupational group. His attempt at formulating a Durkheimian theory of exploitation (through rent extraction) is even more problematic, because it flies in the face of Durkheimian functionalism that underlies the master vision of occupational differentiation. This move leads Grusky away from Durkheimian sociology of occupational differentiation and towards the Weberian theory of market closure. Like Parkin (1979) and Murphy (1988), he argues that occupational and professional groups become the main conduits for closure – which can be seen as both exploitative and defensive.

Now, there is a radical difference between functional differentiation and closure. The former is spontaneous conflict resolution (reducing competition); the latter implies conflict and imposition. Only when one considers occupational groups as conduits for closure do they appear as antagonistic class-like groups. Thus the theory of occupational closure and rent extraction can be formulated only by parting the way with the core tenets

of Durkheimian theory. There is a theoretical cost of this departure. By abandoning the Durkheimian vision of functional differentiation Grusky weakens his ability to explain the *origins* of occupational clusters. Moreover, he faces the evidence of declining closure (state “deregulation”) and waning industrial conflict in advanced societies. This seems to be more in line with the trends anticipated by Durkheim than with predictions derived from the theories of closure.

The main foundations for non-class social analysis of inequality and conflict were laid by Max Weber, especially in his rich but unsystematic notes on *Economy and Society* (1978). What is particularly striking in those notes – and often ignored by both the “left Weberians” and sympathetic Marxist critics – is their polemical tone. Weber rejects Marx’s sweeping claims about universal centrality of class inequality, exploitation, division and antagonism. He also formulates an alternative vision of social stratification in which societal power and lifechances are shaped jointly by market endowments, established cultural conventions of honour and organizational power, especially within the state. These different “generators” may operate solo, in which case social inequalities follow one predominant principle of distribution, or they may combine in producing complex gradations of societal power and lifechances. Either way, market, status and power positions seldom form matrices for group formation. The latter implicate the cultural realm of meaning (Weber 1978:306-7, 927-39).

Both Weber and his followers have argued convincingly for maintaining an analytic separation between the three “generators” and accompanying dimensions of social inequality – class, status and party - and for seeing social stratification and group formation as complex and contingent. These arguments have been typically directed against Marxist class analysts who try to subsume the three generators under the single concept of class, and who often assume an isomorphy between unequal positions and social structure.<sup>8</sup> Weberians also warn against assuming the correspondence between the structure of inequality, the patterns of group formation and the regularities of social action. The three, Weber warns, seldom coincide. “Social classes”, for example, reflect the barriers in social mobility and interaction and they often cut across class boundaries. Similarly, “status groups” form on the matrix of lifestyle and consumption patterns, and they typically ignore class distinctions.

Together with “classic” elite theorist (Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca and Robert Michels), Weber also highlights the centrality of political power as the key aspect of social inequalities in modern societies. Together they argue that it is political power, especially the power of the modern state, that typically undergirds social privileges in modern society. Power comes not only from control of the means of production and from market endowments, but also, and increasingly, from organization, that is, from the control of the means of political domination. Therefore social organization inevitably gives rise to elites - cohesive and solidary oligarchies at the apex of large organizations.

While the elite-mass gap is bound to remind wide, even in formally democratic societies, power hierarchies are likely to generate strong legitimacy by embracing formally democratic procedures. Classless egalitarianism may be an ideological dream, but open political hierarchy and responsible democratic elites are a possibility.

Weberian sociology of power forms a convenient springboard for both a critique of class theory and an alternative form of social analysis of inequality, division and antagonism. The main “generative structures” of social inequality in Weberian sociology are market/property, communal and authority relations. They reflect, respectively: property rights and market freedoms; the established values and conventions of honour distribution; and the strength of corporate bureaucracies (especially in the state). Together, they form socially and historically diverse matrices for the distribution of societal power and individual lifechances. However, these matrices do not necessarily correspond with the ways in which social relations form, social clustering occurs, social divisions appear, and social antagonisms arise. These aspects of hierarchical social formation reflect the autonomous processes of social clustering and closure, identity and solidarity formation, cultural distantiation and political organization - all embedded in the dominant meaning systems. Social divisions may form along the class-market lines, as well as along ethnic, regional (national), party-ideological, racial or religious lines – the point stressed by contemporary neo-Weberians (e.g., Giddens 1973, Scott 1996) and theorists of social space and differential association (e.g., Laumann 1973, Stewart et al. 1980).

### **Complex structures of inequality**

Social inequality may vary in the degree of complexity – the interaction of different structural “generators” – and degree of social articulation, social group formation. Social stratification – the degree to which social inequality is structured into lasting hierarchies – is also variable. So is socio-cultural articulation of hierarchical strata through patterns of shared identities and differential association. When socio-cultural articulation is weak – that is, when strata boundaries are blurred, group identities and solidarities are weak, distances are crosscutting, and divisions are fickle – social inequalities may take a complex and unstratified form. Late modernity, it is argued here, marks a shift in this direction of complex inequality. This calls for an overhaul of our views of social inequality, division and antagonism. The key steps in such an overhaul involve:

#### *Recognizing the multiplicity of generative structures*

As noted by most analysts of industrial modernisation, Max Weber in particular, classes always coincided and competed with other aspects of inequality (1978:306-7, 927-39). While the key power resources can be translated into each other, they seldom cumulate and crystallise into consistent social hierarchies and divisions. This is because class, status and party derive from different aspects of social relations and are accompanied by different formulae legitimising the distribution of social resources. Class favours the

formula “to everyone according to property and marketable skills”. It is insensitive to traditional status claims, and therefore revolutionary in its social consequences. The party-authority hierarchies rely on the principle “to everyone according to the rank”, that is a hierarchical distance from the organizational power centres. Modern state bureaucracies are particularly effective generators of such rank orders, and they became backbones of stratification under state socialism. Finally, the status claims follow the formula “to everyone according to established social conventions”. Such conventions of asymmetric status attribution are typically grounded in tradition (e.g., traditional interpretations of holy texts, established practice, etc.), but they also evolve with new forms of socially recognised “distinction”.

*Recognizing the impact of education and knowledge*

When writing about status groups in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe, Weber mentioned, albeit briefly, new forms of educational “credentialism”

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 privileged stratum in bureaus and offices. Such certificates support their holders’ claim for intermarriages with notable families, claims to adhere to “codes of honour”... claims for a “respectable” remuneration rather than remuneration for work well done, claims for assured advancement and old-age insurance and, above all, claims to monopolise social and economically advantageous positions. (Weber 1948: 241-2)

Success in credentialising depends on securing the capacity to maintain, defend and enforce the rights of credential-holders. As both Weber and his contemporary followers (especially Harold Perkin and Frank Parkin) stress, the claims of these categories, especially the professionals, evoke the status principle of distribution (“according to educational credentials”). Yet they also confront and question the old status claims based on tradition. Therefore the emergent educational status groups are highly ambivalent, if not outright hostile, towards the claims made on the basis of tradition and class. Thus while the professional closure often utilises market monopolies, it also ignores the “naked property rights.” Contemporary professions, intellectuals and managers thus constitute status-type groupings, rather than classes.

Such contemporary status groupings operate in the secular and legal-rational context. They reflect the pervasive liberal ideology of equal opportunity *cum* merit. One may argue that this ideology sits uneasy with class principles. The latter have to adjust to status distinctions – the point made 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. The special status of education (certified higher education in particular) derives from its privileged role as a convenient “index of merit,” rather than the mere source of marketable skills.

Higher education, in particular, turns into the key social articulator of the universalistic principle of achievement and merit. This critical role of education is inherent in, and reinforced by the dominant liberal ideology that identifies education with merit.<sup>9</sup>

*Recognizing the impact of citizenship and democracy*

Tocqueville's analysis of progressive "equality of condition" formed a springboard for contemporary analyses of civic and political inequality. Paradoxically, as students of citizenship and democracy note, the extension of citizenship brings some social levelling, but also a new type of hierarchy and division. On this point, de Tocqueville's intuitions converge with Weberian ideas, though de Tocqueville links the new "despotic" tendencies with the weakness of civil society, while Weber attributes such tendencies to "plebiscitary" trends inherent in mass democratisation and bureaucratic ascendancy. Both Tocquevillian and Weberian scholars see political stratification as crosscutting – and in some ways overshadowing – both the traditional status hierarchies and economic class divisions.

Tocqueville's analysis anticipates Weber's historical analyses of the egalitarian civic status emerging from the historical expansion of western cities and nation-states. The expanding citizenship rights in Britain were analysed by Marshall (1950) and subsequently generalised by Turner (1990). Citizenship grew in coverage and scope. The granting of basic civil liberties was followed by extension of rights into political and social domains. The social/welfare rights, in particular, pitched citizenship against the "power of property" and the "cash nexus" thus affecting the patterns of social inequality. While most social analysts see this expansion of citizenship as a source of egalitarian trends, some also point to hierarchical implications. The appearance of "non-citizens" – refugees, illegal migrants, asylum seekers and widely tolerated but disenfranchised *Gastarbeiters* – heralds the formation of a new civic "underclass" and highlights a new dimension of stratification through civic-political exclusion.

*The impact of gender and racial relations*

The changing form of gender and ethno-racial inequality deserve a special comment. Both approximate "status inequalities" – they are derived from and engendered in traditional social conventions reinforced by ideology and coded into age-long discriminatory social practices, especially in the domestic-familial sphere. Gender inequalities have been reproduced through traditional cultural norms and underlying values. This is why they are strongest in traditional (often pre-capitalist) societies, and why changes in class relations (e.g. those that followed the Russian and Chinese revolutions) had not altered them significantly. By contrast, the rapid de-traditionalization associated with spreading rationalism, individualism and secularism helps in reducing gender gaps.

Gender and ethno-racial inequalities continue to radiate into public spheres, and this results in “genderisation” and “racialisation” of occupations, market segments and political roles. But they seldom produce gender or racial strata. Rather, the genderisation of occupations and market segments illustrates the hybridisation of social stratification that adds to the complexity of contemporary patterns of inequality. This hybridisation 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 transforms the market into a “quasi-cultural” domain. In turn, status conventions 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 through the market idiom of efficiency, productivity, etc.

As these examples indicate, hybridisation is not restricted to the interpenetration between the market and communal relations. A similar interpenetration occurs between the market command systems, and communal norms. The concentration of industrial production, for example, has accompanied the emergence of corporate managerial positions. The lifechances of corporate managers are a function of marketable skills, hierarchical location, and the very size *cum* strategic location of the corporation. This is particularly important when private and state hierarchies combine in the process of corporatist fusions – as it occurred in Western Europe in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup>

### **Stratification and social formation**

Increasing hybridisation heralds the decomposition of the industrial classes and the concomitant departure from class society. This is reflected in an increasingly complex pattern of hierarchical group formation – social stratification - to which we must now turn.

Social stratification refers to structured vertical patterning: social hierarchy plus social division. Clusters of unequal positions are linked by social proximity and separated by social distances. It also refers to *processes* of hierarchical social clustering and closure. Such processes are reversible; changing inequality patterns involve de-stratification and re-stratification along class and non-class lines.

#### *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, social distances and proximities. While this is a matter of degree, “stratification proper” emerges only when there is a minimal social formation, that is a relatively clear and stable vertical patterning through social clustering and closure. It

makes little sense to talk about stratified society in the absence of such recognisable “social strata”.

Clustering typically involves overlaps between different aspects of inequality in a way that facilitates social recognition; social closure involves the formation of persisting social distances and proximities. Thus class stratification, especially in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain, involved what we may call “status usurpation” (and degradation) through increasing overlap and convergence of 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 craftsmen and industrial workers was another.

Following the Weberian track, we can say that the distinctiveness of social strata depends on the degree of social closure, the capacity of strata members to restrict important social interactions, and on socio-demographic closure, the capacity for reproduction across generations. The best markers of social closure have been intermarriages and intergenerational continuity of economic roles. Intermarriages within the sets of socially recognized strata (be it classes, status groups or political ranks) reinforce strata reproduction. Such reproduction is also facilitated by a formation of sociocultural habituses through which social distinction and social stigma become meaningful and legitimate (though never unchallenged, as Bourdieu notes).

Attention of contemporary stratification sociologists focuses on “occupational classes”, that is vertical clusters of positions forming on the matrix of technical division of labour, as well as property and employment relations.<sup>11</sup> Occupational class formation has been well researched. Some critics note that the boundaries of “occupational classes” are porous and fickle. When they solidify, this typically follows credentialisation. However, such credentialisation, especially if it involves educational certification and meritocratic legitimation, tends to follow the logic of status group formation (as noted by Turner 1988). Similarly, racial and ethno-strata (e.g. Blacks in the US, Chinese in East Asia, Aborigines in Australia) can be seen as examples of contemporary status-like strata. They merge with and crosscut sociopolitical hierarchies. Contemporary elites and “political classes” are examples of vertical social clusters in such hierarchies forming around positions of political influence.<sup>12</sup>

Students of occupational classes point to a proliferation of loosely structured and vertically organised social clusters. This proliferation reflects the progressive differentiation (the central tenets of Durkheimian sociology) that erodes the internal homogeneity of the large-scale occupational clusters, such as industrial workers or agricultural labourers. While in the past such clusters may have approximated classes, contemporary occupational divisions are too weak and fragmented to do so. Social formation seems to follow the pattern of progressive differentiation that is both technical and social in nature.

*Communities and groups*

Until now we have discussed the first aspect of social formation, namely clustering and closure. Both are matters of degree. They result in what Holton (1996) and Turner (1996) (following the classical Toennies' distinction) call *gesellschaftlich* clusters and strata. *Gemeinschaftlich* groupings require stronger social formation involving sociocultural articulation: development of collective identities and solidarities. Such strong formation is typically accomplished through leadership and organization. When social categories attain such identities and solidarities – a rare and contingent development – they transform into communities and may also spawn organized collective actors, typically parties or movements.

Community and group formation lies at the centre of social stratification perspective. Seen from the Durkheimian perspective, stratification involves the formation of in- out-group solidarities and distances, and the accompanying processes of social evaluations cum ranking in relation to the dominant values. This path of analysis points to three inter-related aspects of stratification process: social classification and boundary drawing, evaluation cum granting/claiming of social esteem which reflect the “distance from the sacred”, internal identity-formation and cohesion building. The latter processes involve the formation of strong collective representations and internal normative regulation.

Durkheimian sociology of inequalities pays more attention to popular classification and boundary drawing than to vertical ranking, that is, the “stratification proper”. This reflects the well-known Durkheim's observation that especially those who consider themselves as socially disadvantaged always contest hierarchical orders. Communities and groups may, or may not, form “consensual” hierarchical orders. If they do, these orders - reflecting shared values (or the distance from the sacred) - are precarious. The interplay of social differentiation (horizontal group formation) and stratification (contested vertical ordering and ranking) is the favourite topic of students of social distances and solidarities.<sup>13</sup>

The neo-Weberian and elite perspectives highlight the formation of vertical communities within national power hierarchies. Both see them as contingent and complex, reflecting shared lifestyle, communication channels, common enemy, and effective leadership as key factors enhancing community. The main symptom of communal bonds is a shared identity backed by a popular label of recognition. Such identity – and easy self-identification – form the foundation for solidary action. Perhaps the best examples of communal power groupings are political elites. The minimum degree of internal cohesion and “groupness”, in fact, is a definitional feature of elites.

Hierarchical communal groups are rare because their formation and social reproduction consume vast amounts of collective energy and resources. Social distances have to be

cultivated through patterned interaction and lifestyle distinction (Weber). Communities also rely on cultural reproduction of classifications and ritual reassertion of shared values (Durkheim). It is not surprising therefore that the best examples of such communal strata are typically historical status groups, such as “classic” Indian casts. The two contemporary examples of large-scale *gesellschaftlich* groupings – nations and professional associations – do not lend themselves well to stratification analysis. Attempts at identifying contemporary *gesellschaftlich* strata on sub-national level, especially in advanced societies, have seldom been successful.

This often lead to a highly problematic distinction between “objective” (structural) and “subjective” (meaningful) aspects of social hierarchy. Class structure, for example, is sometimes seen by its proponents as independent of actor/subject (often false) consciousness and only loosely related to social perceptions, norms, and the actual patterns of associations. It is also found among some sympathetic critics of class analysis, such as Beck (1992) and Eder (1993) who sees classes as “objective” material substrata on which various forms of highly individualised “subjective” identifications, cultural orientations and lifestyles grow. The dangers of such option is that – if the “mediating” links are not specified – it weakens the explanatory potential stratification theory and invites supplementary accounts of identity formation, cultural orientations and lifestyles. Some such “mediations” and supplementary accounts are suggested by Bourdieu (1984) who insists that “class formation” is mediated through, first, the habitus and then the popular classifications.<sup>14</sup> The problem is that the mediating causal complexes may work both ways. It is not clear, therefore, whether and to what degree habituses and popular classifications shape the social space (the distribution of multiple capitals), or are shaped by it. While the more orthodox class theorists see the material-economic “substratum” as the ultimate determinant of meanings, some revisionists, like Bourdieu, suggest more complex causal complexes and admit socio-cultural determinations.

### *Social actors*

The key social actors are elites and organized political groups, including those representing social movements and lobbies. Occasionally, the status of collective actor is also attributed to stratified communities – be it class-occupational, ethnic, civic or hybrid. They may use a class idiom of appeal – that is mobilise interests and solidarities engendered in employment roles and market capacities – or a status idiom, or a power-political idiom, or a combination of different idiomatic appeals. Appeals to ethno-racial exclusion and discrimination, as in the case of the civil rights and minority movements, or appeals to shared religion and race, as in the case of anti-Western fundamentalist movements, illustrate such mixed mobilisation strategies.

The emergence of collective actors heralds the deepening of sociopolitical cleavages. As Lipset and Rokkan (1967) remind us, the dominant sociopolitical cleavages in the West originated in the national and industrial revolutions. The Industrial Revolution generated

strong class (owner – worker) as well as sectoral (agricultural - industrial) cleavages. The organizational formatting of these cleavages 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 organized vertical clusters identified as class constituencies. The elites appealed to common “class interests” of these clusters, focused debates on issues of work and production, stressed the social implications of property rights and asymmetric power in employment contracts, and linked their programs with ideological packages that reflected the left-right polarity.<sup>15</sup> While this class formatting proved very successful in the past in generating “working class” movements and parties (as well as some “middle class” political movements), it has always competed with alternative formatting along national, regional, religious, civic and ethnic lines. The latter have been dominant in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as illustrated by the successful mobilisation of “new” social movements that spawned new political parties and propelled to power new elite factions.

#### *Diverse social formation*

Thus structured inequalities, as seen here, vary in degree of complexity and social articulation. In a minimal sense, they involve loose social hierarchies forming around unevenly distributed resources. Structured forms of inequality - social stratification - imply a minimum vertical clustering. In a stronger sense, social stratification involves the emergence of stratified communal groupings – the processes associated with the formation of distinct and strong collective identities. Communal strata may also spawn collective social actors. This is an ongoing and reversible process, as illustrated by the rise and decline of class-allied movements, parties and elites. Overlapping inequalities and divisions may reinforce stratification, while complex and crosscutting inequalities, especially when combined with open mobility, result in destratification. Destratification and restratification typically coincide; old patterns and configurations give way to new ones.

The degree of social formation of hierarchical groupings tends to vary at different points of stratification systems. Typically, social formation is strongest at the top of social hierarchies, where elites form. In fact, strong social formation (consensus, cohesion and interaction) has been seen as a definitional feature of elites. The upper strata also form social circles, establishments, clubs and other status groups with various degrees of exclusiveness. The middle and lower ranks tend to be less socially structured and are often described as a fluid “middle mass” (e.g., Broom and Jones 1973).

#### **Configurations 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. While such boundary judgements are necessarily arbitrary, a typological distinction between inequality and stratification is extremely useful in charting social trends of destratification vs restratification. Such

trends have been discussed in the context of debate about the relevance of class by Stanislaw Ossowski (1963: 89-118) and Dennis Wrong (1964: 5-16). They coined the terms “non-egalitarian classlessness,” “inequality without stratification” and “classless inequality.” Social inequalities, they argued, may take an unstratified form, as well as stratified but non-class forms. These configurations of inequality may result from ascendancy of status groups or political ranks, and/or from the decomposition of the old classes and social strata.

The waning of pre-modern estates (“social orders”) in Europe was a good example of destratification, which was followed by restratification and industrial class formation. The latter was complicated by the fact that the waning estate hierarchies left behind residual aristocracies and nobilities, as well as specific “status strata” of urban “intelligentsia”. Another example of destratification was the suppression of class orders following the political takeovers and revolutions in Soviet –type societies. It involved “elimination” of upper classes and strata, and was accompanied by a rapid ascendancy of political rank stratification, especially the emergence of party-state officialdom and the *nomenklatura*.

The pattern of variation in configurations of inequality is summarised in Figure 1. The proposed typology results from a cross-cutting of the two dimensions: (i) the degree of complexity, the predominance of one type of “generators” and the concomitant dominant principle of resource allocation, and (ii) the strength/degree of hierarchical social formation which we dichotomised into strong *versus* weak. The cross-cutting of these two results in four types: dominant stratification, dominant inequality, hybrid stratification and complex inequality (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Configurations of inequality – a typology**

	Social formation	
	<i>High/Strong</i>	<i>Low/Weak</i>
<b>Generative structures</b>		
<i>Single/dominant “generator” &amp; low complexity</i>	dominant stratification (e.g., “class society”)	dominant inequality
<i>Multiple/hybridised “generators” &amp; high complexity</i>	complex/hybrid stratification	complex “classless” inequality

This opens the way for more precise definitions of the key concepts. In class society property/market-generated inequalities are most salient, and the degree of class formation is high. Unequal lifechances of individuals reflect principally their property status and market endowments; lifechances of family/household members reflect the endowments of the head. Honour and influence follow class position; social divisions form around

class boundaries and inequalities. When formation is strong, group awareness and identity are reflected in organization and solidary action (class politics). This type follows closely the model promoted by Marxist class analysts and – as acknowledged below - it was approximated by industrial West European societies in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Class inequality is characterised by a dominance of class generators of inequality accompanied by weak social formation, a weak social articulation of class. While societal power is distributed predominantly according to the principle “to everyone according to property and market endowments”, there are no discernible class groupings, divisions and conflicts. One may argue that this type of inequality characterises periods of rapid social change and transition. Early 19<sup>th</sup> century Western societies, 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.

Complex social inequality and hybrid stratification refer to configurations in which no single system of inequality predominates. Instead, the lifechances form around complex profiles combining class, status and authority positions. Gendered occupational strata and market segments, as well as racial and ethno-specific “underclass” enclaves are good examples of such hybrid configurations of inequality. If clustering is strong and social strata develop around the complex combinations of positions, we are dealing with complex/hybrid stratification. 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 “the Catholic intelligentsia.”

Like any general and ideal typology, this one offers only a partial help in resolving the class debate. It charts the analytic field, but does not help in operationalising the boundaries. One may also object that such a typology is loaded, that is makes dominant stratification type (including “class society”) less realistic, less likely to be identified than other types. After all, objectors may say, class inequalities and divisions have *always* coincided with divisions generated by communal and state-authoritarian relations, and therefore a configuration approximating this type may be rare. There are two answers to these objections. First, they miss the point. While the “boundary judgements” are not specified, class stratification and class inequality *are* admitted here as realistic possibilities – as realistic as any other configuration. In fact, it is argued below that configurations of inequality in Western Europe at the turn of the century approximated closely class society type. Such configurations persisted throughout the world wars and post-war decades, reproduced mainly through sociopolitical formatting in the context of corporatist deals. Second, the typology is to be utilised for charting *trends*, rather than pigeonholing *cases*. For this purposes, its generality and ideal-typical nature are less of the liability.

Perhaps the most controversial claim made below is that social inequalities in contemporary advanced societies increasingly approximate the fourth type in Figure 1, that is complex (“classless”) inequality. This means that social inequalities in such societies increasingly form on multiple and hybridised matrices, and that social formation is weak, thus resulting in multiple, continuous and cross cutting hierarchies, and in weakly articulated, fickle groupings. Such a configuration has been analysed elsewhere under a label of “status-conventional hierarchy” subject to *fragmentation* and *contingency* (Pakulski and Waters 1996). A shift towards complex stratification has to be seen in a historical context of destratification and class decomposition, to which we now turn.

### **Modern trends – a short history of class**

As noted by Weber, the processes of class formation in Western Europe, especially the formation of working class communities, reflected rather unique coincidence of spatial concentration, good communication, clear visions of the “class enemy,” and above all ideological and political leadership exercised by the political elite of socialist movements. Political leaders and activists of these movements successfully convinced large sections of manual (mainly industrial) workers that they shared economic and political interests and should embark on the proposed programs of social reconstruction. Working class consciousness, solidarity and identity were, to a large extent, political accomplishments. They reflected the relatively uniform working conditions in the factory system, territorial proximity and, above all, new opportunities opened by bureaucratisation and democratisation of nation states in the context of war mobilisations. 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 party leadership – that truly represented working class and its interests.

Emile Durkheim anticipated fragmentation of “working classes”. The internal cohesion (solidarity) of such classes was of a mechanical-ideological nature. The social articulation of class division and conflict reflected anomic conditions of early industrialisation, rather than a “normal” trend. Progressive functional differentiation and individualism, predicted Durkheim, would erode the commonalities of work and interests, and the state would promote occupational and syndicalist aggregations. The processes of social change, combined with social engineering (normative regulation sponsored by the occupational groups, education, state activities and the spread of civic

religions) would and should blur overarching class identities and divisions. Social citizenship and nationalism would become ideological contenders to class solidarity.

These predictions proved largely accurate. The processes of social differentiation, progressive individualisation, and the gradual absorption of racial minorities and women into the labour force, have undermined class formation already in the second quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. So did the extension of citizenship rights, especially the social/welfare rights. The life of social classes was prolonged mainly through ideological and political organization: ideologies with class references, class-oriented party programs and class-coupled elites. Persisting “class politics” formed a lifeline for class at the time of rapid differentiation of working conditions and lifestyles. Liberal corporatism facilitated this sociopolitical perpetuation of class identities by sponsoring class parties and class politics (the “democratic class struggle” and corporatist deals). Paradoxically, it also blunted class conflicts by insisting on their institutional regulation (Dahrendorf 1959). These conflicts transformed into legalised rituals of national collective negotiations and bargaining. Such etatised 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 may sound to any Marxist class theorist’s ears like a heresy. Yet, such a view may help in explaining the sequential diagnoses of class decomposition (Dahrendorf), fragmentation (Lipset), and waning class politics (Clark). It allows us to see class formation as weakened first by occupational differentiation and market fragmentation, then undermined by the unravelling corporatist deals, and finally destroyed by the decomposition of class elites, organizations (parties and trade unions) and ideologies. The latter followed the withering away of corporatism and the advancement of globalisation. These processes of historical decomposition of class society can be summarised in three stages:

I. Early modern industrialising societies (liberal capitalism) where class divisions overlapped with estate 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 (emphasising equality of opportunity) and political citizenship erode estate divisions. This marks a transition from estate to class stratification.

II. Modern industrial societies (organized capitalism) where class divisions are strong and politically articulated (class parties, movements, ideologies, etc.). 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 urbanisation facilitate the social articulation of middle classes. However, progressive occupational differentiation 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 (disorganised capitalism) where industrial classes decompose. The collapsing corporatist deals, globalisation, intense social differentiation and progressive individualism prompt further (ideological and political) class decomposition and destratification. Conventional status inequalities that emerge in the process of class decomposition are fickle resembling a status bazaar. This heralds a transition from hybrid stratification to complex (classless) inequality.

### **Towards complex (classless) inequalities**

The shift to the third stage marks a change in the configuration of social inequalities. If one adopts a geological analogy (which underlies the stratification imagery), postmodernisation constitutes an earthquake destroying the formerly well articulated, clustered and layered class and status formations. The very notion of stratification has to be critically reviewed in order to adjust the imagery and concepts to the complex, yet less stratified and less nationally organized, social configuration of inequalities.

The late-/post- modern shift is driven mainly by the social differentiation, which is functional, social and moral in its nature.<sup>16</sup> Differentiation involves not only the 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-forming processes. This transparency strips the process of social differentiation of its “naturalness”. It also makes the centrally organized social reproduction of distinctions and social boundaries increasingly problematic. Consequently, such boundaries 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 what he calls “contemporary classes” 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 specialised” task groups (e.g., Piore and Sabel 1984). Another consequence of this flexible specialisation is further blurring of functional roles, further fragmentation of occupational categories and further erosion of 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 – and themselves differentiated –

criteria of status evaluation. With multiple market fragmentation, the notion of an overarching social hierarchy becomes problematic. Social differentiation blurs social stratification.

In the most advanced societies, 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 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/employment 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 – because 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. As suggested by Durkheim and Simmel, it is both the cause and the effect of social differentiation. According to Durkheim, individualism accompanies the “organic” social cohesion and favours complementary difference over likeness. When elevated by the liberal ideology to a status of social “meta-principle”, individualism undermines further collectivistic projects, thus hindering social class formation. In the highly individualised culture weak and transient ties predominate over strong and lasting collective bonds. 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.

The combined processes of differentiation and individualisation affect the patterns of communal relations by enhancing pluralism of values and lifestyles. Increased interpenetration of value system accompanying the globalisation process aids and reinforces this process even further. Status standards and the underlying value systems are increasingly complex and exposed to challenges – thus unable to sustain stable hierarchies. The old status groupings are either waning or fragmenting because closures and systematic exclusions are likely to be contested. 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.

Further extensions of citizenship into social/welfare) rights have been arrested. However, the proliferation of demands for rights has continued, mainly in the cultural/symbolic areas - as rights to dignified, non-stigmatising representation in the popular media. 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 moral, political and symbolic levels. They are questioned even as terminological distinctions – the phenomenon often criticised as “political correctness”. 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 democratisation operates in a similar manner. As anticipated by Weber, it takes an increasingly plebiscitary or populist 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 social formation. As Clark and Lipset (2001) 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 short-term protest movement mobilisations, rather than organised and class-based cleavages and politics.

### Conclusions

If the above diagnosis of postmodern trends is correct, class inequalities and divisions of the industrial era will continue to give way to complex inequality. With this shift, the relevance and class analysis is bound diminish even further. Not because it is incorrect, but because it focuses on social configurations that are waning. More general forms of social analysis that acknowledge the changing configurations of inequality may provide more adequate analytic and theoretical tools for sociology. Such tools have been identified in the classical heritage of Tocquevillian, Durkheimian and Weberian sociology of inequality. Social analysis built on such analytic and theoretical foundations fits better than class analysis the “postmodern condition” characterised by growing social complexity. It particularises the concept of class and waves the assumptions about the primacy of class structure as the backbone of the social structure and the matrix of social stratification.

Which strategy – the reconstruction and updating of class theory and analysis, as suggested by other contributors to this volume, or developing a broadly-based social analysis of inequality and antagonism, as suggested here - is better, that is more capable of highlighting and accounting for contemporary configurations of social inequality and antagonisms? On that question, one should stress, the jury is still out. And, considering the paradigmatic nature of the competing analytic and theoretical constructs, it may be out for a long while.<sup>17</sup> Ultimately, the adjudication of the debate is likely to come from both the academic community testing the validity of class theories against their non-class

competitors, and from political practitioners embracing the most popular and appealing concepts and accounts.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For example, Pakulski and Waters (1996a, b), Clark and Lipset (2001).

<sup>2</sup> The best test of relevance is the capacity of class analysis to shed light on such key developments of the last century as the formation of communist states, the rise and defeat of fascism, the extension of citizenship, the mobilization of “new” (civil rights, feminist, green and minority rights) movements, the fall of European communism, the unification of Europe, and the mobilization of religious fundamentalisms.

<sup>3</sup> Identified, among others, by Waters (1991) and discussed in more details in Pakulski and Waters (1996a).

<sup>4</sup> Such constructs are outlined in more details elsewhere - see the forthcoming Pakulski (2004). Below I sketch only the “foundational” backbone non-class analysis.

<sup>5</sup> “To tell the truth, though there are rich men, the class of rich men does not exist; for these rich individuals have no feelings and purposes, no traditions or hopes, in common; there are individuals, therefore, but no definite class... Their relative position is not a permanent one; they are constantly drawn together or separated by their interests.” (1945 II, p. 160)

<sup>6</sup> Tocqueville analysed this danger in his studies of “despotic democracy”.

<sup>7</sup> If one class in society is obliged, in order to live, to take any price for its services, while another can abstain from such action thanks to resources at its disposal, which, however, are not necessarily due to any social superiority, the second has an unjust advantage over the first in law. In other words, there cannot be rich and poor at birth without there being unjust contracts. (Durkheim 1933, p. 384)

<sup>8</sup> 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, p. 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.

<sup>9</sup> 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).

<sup>10</sup> The emergence of corporate elites and the subordinate operatives, the “white collar” strata, has been analysed in by Ralf Dahrendorf (1959), C. Wright Mills (1956, 1958) and contemporary elite theorists.

<sup>11</sup> 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”.

<sup>12</sup> Partocratic strata and the politically circumscribed *nomenklaturas* in communist societies are also good examples of such strata. See classical elite theorists and, in the context of class analysis, works of Wesolowski e.g. 1977.

---

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Bourdieu (1984) and Bottero and Prandy (2003). As noted by Durkheim (eg. 1933, p.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.

<sup>14</sup> As Brubaker (1985, p. 761) points out,  
“The conceptual space within which Bourdieu defines class is not that of production, but that of social relations in general. Class divisions are defined not by differing relations to the means of production, but by the differing conditions of existence, differing systems of dispositions produced by differential conditioning, and differing endowments of capital.”

<sup>15</sup> See Clark’s (2001) model. Sartori (1969), together with elite theorists, emphasizes a process of structuring from above.

<sup>16</sup> 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, especially of symbols and services. Proliferation of lifestyles and social identities related to consumption styles and tastes.

<sup>17</sup> See a discussion of the competing paradigms in Pakulski (2001).