

Lecture 4.

Social Classes I. Classical Approaches

Classes sociales I. Approches classiques

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Social classes. A key dimension of sociology

- Social classes → ∞.
 - Seen as the prototype of sociological discourse
- Early sociologists like Durkheim or US First Chicago School → little emphasis on social classes
- Growing influence of Marx in 20th century sociology
 - Weber, Elias → take into account Class
- Bourdieu put classes & class background at the of sociology
- Today, saying “it’s social” ≈ “determined by class background”
 - Important element of the social. But not the only one.

All societies are unequal but... differently

- Hunter-gatherer societies
 - Inequalities low. Private property limited.
 - Categorical inequalities often based on gender & seniority.
 - Variety of unequal structures
 - Ex. Big man versus chief societies (Sahlins, 1972; Lu & Lee, 2023)
- Neolithic revolution: “Great de-equalization” (Scheidel, 2017)
- Stratification of societies combine two dimensions
 - Economic (Monopolization of stocks and flows of resources)
 - Symbolic (Symbolic categorization of groups & their boundaries)
- Two extremes:
 - Castes systems (primacy of symbolic hierarchization)
 - Classes systems (primacy of economic hierarchization)



Picture: Hunter gatherer wall paintings,
<https://www.worldatlas.com>

Outline

1. Preindustrial stratifications
 - 1.1. Castes
 - 1.2. Order society
2. Marxist economic conception of social classes
 - 2.1. Economic classes Before Marx. Physiocrats and Ricardo
 - 2.2. Relations of production and the distribution of the surplus-value
 - 2.3. Classes and exploitation under Capitalism
 - 2.4. From economic classes to social classes
 - 2.5. Polarization prediction and its failure
3. Alternative approaches
 - 3.1. Max Weber and the plurality of orders
 - 3.2. Warner and Yankee City
 - 3.3 Constructivist approach of the social classes
 - 3.3.1. The making of the working class
 - 3.3.2. The *Cadres*

Castes

- India: Very ancient civilization & sophisticated stratification system
 - Definition by Bouglé (1908): “*Nous dirons qu’une société est soumise au régime des castes si elle est divisée en un grand nombre groupes héréditairement spécialisés, hiérarchiquement superposés et mutuellement opposés, si elle s’oppose à la fois aux mélanges de sang, aux conquêtes de rang et aux changements de métiers*”
 - 1) professional specialization 2) Hierarchy, 3) Endogamy, 4) Immobility
- Obscure origins:
 - Ethno/racial mythology of different colors (varnas) and nose shape with arrivals of “Aryan” population in 2000 BC?
 - Mostly a religious phenomenon: « *une institution religieuse. Elle repose sur des scrupules de pureté devenus quasi instinctifs.* » (Bouglé, p 72)



Picture: excerpt from *Seventy-two Specimens of Castes in India*. 1837

Varnas & Jati. Myths and reality

- Varna: 4 hierarchized groups defined in Vedic religious sacred texts (~700 BC) in organic way
 - 1. Brahmans: Priests. (head)
 - 2. Kshatriyas: Warriors. (arms)
 - 3. Vaishyas: originally agriculturers, but mostly merchants (thighs [*cuisse*])
 - 4. Shudras: servants, lower groups (feet)
- 1 to 3 (Aryan Varnas twice born status). Trace of Indo-European trifunctional organization (Dumezil)
- And 1 group outside 4 Varnas
 - Untouchables/Dalit/Harijan
- In practice, 1000s of Jatis (castes).
 - Correspondence between Jatis and Varnas for Brahmans and Dalit... but not so much for other jatis
- => Description of the traditional caste system as studied by anthropologists (early to mid 20th century)
 - Warning: Indian/Pakistanian society evolved!

Example: Rampura, 1948

Jati	Traditional occupation	N
Okkaliga	Farmer	735
Kuruba	Shepherds	235
Musulmans	Artisans, merchants	179
Holeya	Servants, Farm worker	125
Ganiga	Oil pressers / Presseurs d'huile	37
Acari	Blacksmith/ Forgerons	35
Lingayat	Priest	33
...		
Brahmane Hoysala	Priest	6
Brahmane Madhya	Priest	6
Brahmane Sri Vaishnava	Priest	3

- 1523 inhabitants
- 19 castes/jatis

- More over, there's often subcasts

Rules of separation: Endogamy

- You should marry in your caste
 - Woman having a relation with a man from a lower caste brings shame to the whole group
 - Exception: Hypergamic marriage (woman marrying higher status man) between subcasts of the same caste, and sometimes between casts
 - Woman's family brings a dowry [une dot]
- → Reproduction of castes: you are born, you live and die in your castes

LE MONDE – FRANCOISE CHIPAUX -

5/7/2002 : Au Pakistan, la justice tribale ordonne un viol collectif en public

“La justice villageoise ou tribale, qui trop souvent dans le sous-continent indien remplace la justice civile, en particulier dans les affaires d'honneur, avait décidé du viol collectif de la jeune femme en représailles au « comportement répréhensible » de son frère. Shakoor, âgé de 12 ans, avait été vu en compagnie d'une jeune fille qui appartenait à une caste plus élevée. Immédiatement arrêté, Shakoor a été, semble-t-il, sodomisé par ses bourreaux, qui ont réuni un conseil pour décider de la punition à infliger à sa famille. Les suppliques du père de la jeune femme et les siennes n'ont pas fait fléchir les « juges », qui ont décidé de son viol collectif suivi de son retour chez elle, nue, à travers les rues du village.”

Rules of separation: commensality

- You should not accept food from lower castes
- Food more or less protected against lower caste ritual pollution
 - Unprepared (neutral status) *vs* prepared (affected by social status of the cook)
 - *Pakka* (fried) more protected *vs kacha* (boiled), more fragile to pollution (especially boiled vegetables). (A bit like bread in Europe)
 - Tableware [*vaisselle*]. Metal like silver more protected *vs terracotta*, more fragile



Rules of separation: occupation

- Many names of castes are occupation names
- Asymmetric correspondence
 - Some occupations only for the caste members specialized
 - Only member Brahman caste can be priest, barber cast can be barber
 - Especially occupations with religious dimensions, either pure (higher castes) or impure (lower castes)
 - ex. Paraiyar in Tamil Nadu, lower caste specialized in drumming for funerals (impure). But mostly farm laborer during the year.
 - But not all member are in these occupations
 - Blunt (1911) study: 5% of Brahmans are priests.
- In agricultural India, most work in agriculture
- Modern occupation → coexistence of many castes (with tensions). Some attempts to monopolize an occupation by a subcast (ex. driver)



Picture: Nai (barber) doing his work (c. 1870s)

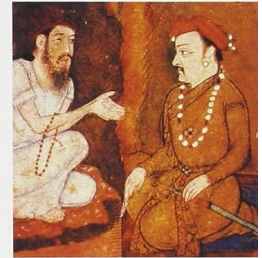
A religious system based on the opposition of purity and impurity

- Purification at the core of the religious system
 - Cycle of reincarnation.
 - Purification enables “upward mobility” to higher status. And eventually *Moksha*: liberation from reincarnation
 - Sacredness requires purity. Professionals of sacred can not do impure things: devoted to others
- Sources of impurity: the body
 - Things coming from the body are impure (urine, saliva, blood, ... dead body)
 - Cow sacred animal/ Double of the Brahman. Occupation dealing with dead cows (leather, etc): lower castes
- Impurity is highly contagious. From activity to person, to food, to castes, etc.
- Solution avoidance of impurity

Louis Dumont

Homo hierarchicus

Le système des castes et ses implications



tel gallimard

Modern evolution of the caste system

- Democratization and its limit
 - Modern Indian State try to abolish caste system
 - Positive discrimination for “scheduled classes and scheduled tribes”
 - Dalit and various indigenous tribes
 - Quotas at universities, local and national assemblies, administration
 - Reinforcement of caste boundaries?
 - Competition for positive discrimination
 - Measures for “other backward classes”
 - In some states, all caste positively discriminated except Brahmins.
 - Violence surrounding the extent of positive discrimination
- Sanskritization
 - Process through which collectively try to improve their status through the adoption of the practices of upper castes
 - For instance adoption of vegetarian regime to imitate Brahmins
- Substantialization
 - Castes move from organic cooperation to competition.
 - Adopt association and lobbies, notably to get substantial measures of positive discrimination.

Feudal societies (in Europe)

- *Oratores, bellatores, laboratores* – A trifunctional ideological representation put forward by clerics around 1,000 CE (Duby, 1978)
 - “(...) *les uns prient, les autres combattent, les autres enfin travaillent. Ces trois parties qui coexistent ne souffrent pas d’être disjointes ; les services rendus par l’une sont la condition des œuvres des deux autres ; chacune à son tour se charge de soulager l’ensemble.*” Adalbéron de Laon (1030)
- Clergy. Around year 1000, Gregorian reform. Chastity imposed to clergy as a form of purity
 - → Can’t reproduce themselves as the Brahman caste. → External recruitment
- Feudal lords
 - Extreme decentralisation of power. Size of fiefs determined by military protection capacity
 - Vassalic loyalty ties linking Feudal lords. Vassal owes assistance to its suzerain, suzerain owes protection & grants a fief.
 - Split loyalties
 - Instable and violent society with multiplication of conflicts



Picture: Homage ceremony in *Liber feudorum Ceritania*

Feudal societies (in Europe): Serves

- Origin: Status convergence of between free settlers and slaves
 - Roman slaves fueled by military conquests.
 - With decline of victories→ slave shortages
 - Master grant some freedom for enabling reproduction
 - Instability: Free settlers (often former soldiers) grouping around villae and asking for protection
- Medieval serves
 - Granted some rights on some use of the lords' land for reproduction of labor. (Superposition of multiple rights on same land)
 - Attached to the master land.
 - Duties: *Corvée*, multiple *taxes*, limitations (*banalités*)



Lord's supervisor monitors harvest
[15th century, BNF, Paris]

An ambiguous “contractual” arrangement

- Feudal system can be seen as contracting
 - Work against protection (somehow like early mafia)
 - Work against religious salute
- Different from free contracting
 - ‘The lord protects us but who will protect us from the lord’
 - A system of extortion of surplus value based on violence



Lord taking back a fief

Social groups in a period of equal rights

- English/US/French revolutions: Equality of rights
 - “*Art 1. Les hommes naissent et demeurent libres et égaux en droits ; les distinctions sociales ne peuvent être fondées que sur l'utilité commune*”
 - Primacy of equality: No legal status distinction
 - Principles of differentiation: Recognition of property and talent
 - Free contracts
- Stratification, not based on entrenched legal status or strong symbolic barriers
 - Economic based classes



Picture: Le Barbier, *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*

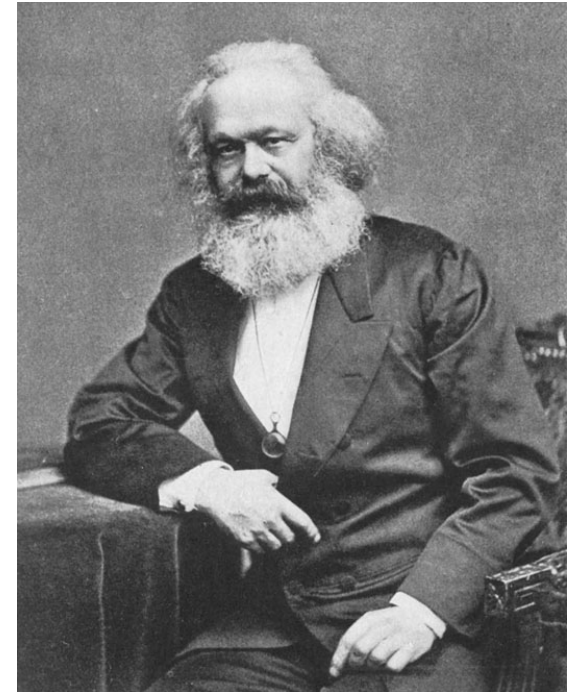
Karl, La classe!

“L'histoire de toute société jusqu'à nos jours n'a été que l'histoire des luttes de classes. Homme libre et esclave, patricien et plébéien, baron et serf, maître de jurande et compagnon, en un mot oppresseurs et opprimés, en opposition constante, ont mené une guerre ininterrompue, tantôt ouverte, tantôt dissimulée, une guerre qui finissait toujours soit par une transformation révolutionnaire de la société tout entière, soit par la destruction des deux classes en lutte.

Dans les premières époques historiques, nous constatons presque partout une organisation complète de la société en classes distinctes, une échelle graduée de conditions sociales. Dans la Rome antique, nous trouvons des patriciens, des chevaliers, des plébéiens, des esclaves; au moyen âge, des seigneurs, des vassaux, des maîtres de corporation, des compagnons, des serfs et, de plus, dans chacune de ces classes, une hiérarchie particulière. La société bourgeoise moderne, élevée sur les ruines de la société féodale, n'a pas aboli les antagonismes de classes Elle n'a fait que substituer de nouvelles classes, de nouvelles conditions d'oppression, de nouvelles formes de lutte à celles d'autrefois.

Cependant, le caractère distinctif de notre époque, de l'époque de la bourgeoisie, est d'avoir simplifié les antagonismes de classes. La société se divise de plus en deux vastes camps ennemis, en deux grandes classes diamétralement opposées : la bourgeoisie et le prolétariat.”

Marx & Engels (1848)

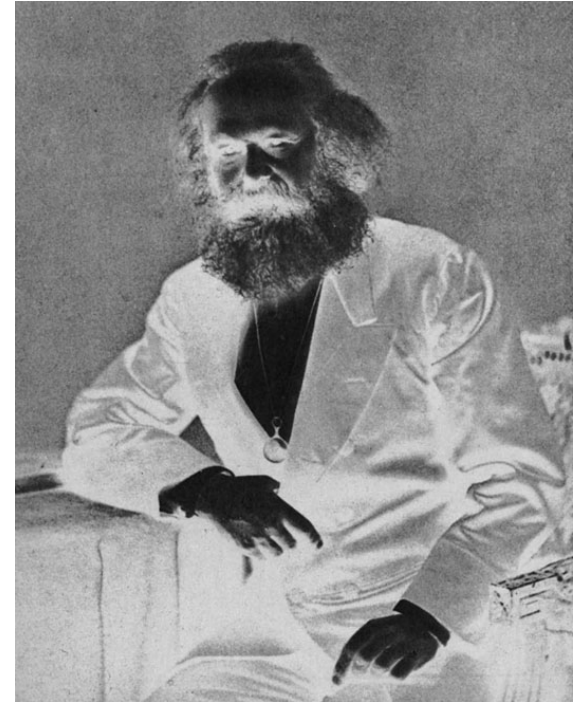


Classy Karlie!

“The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.

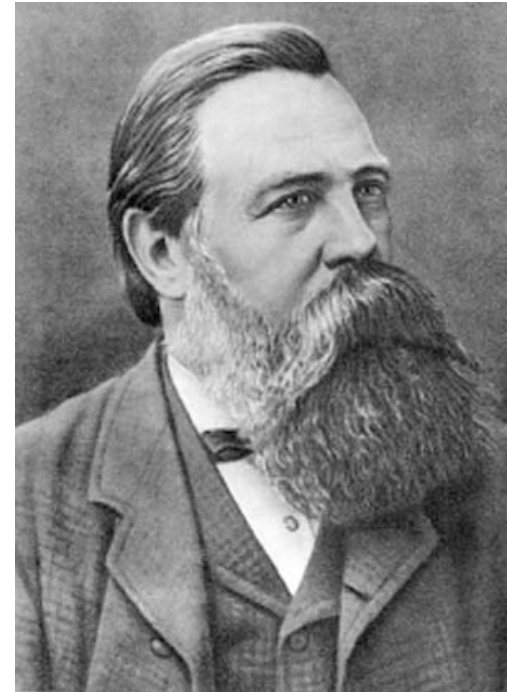
In the earlier epochs of history, we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank. In ancient Rome we have patricians, knights, plebeians, slaves; in the Middle Ages, feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices, serfs; in almost all of these classes, again, subordinate gradations. The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones.

Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinct feature: it has simplified class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other — Bourgeoisie and Proletariat. ” Marx & Engels (1848)



Classes for Marx (& Engels) combines...

- An economic analysis of capitalism
 - Based on the work of previous economists
- A historical and legal approach of modes of production
- A sociological & historical approach of class agency



Friedrich Engels

Economic classes before Marx

- Quesnay: 3-classes table of the economy
 - 1. Productive class (farmers)
 - 2. Sterile class (industry)
 - 3. Land owners (aristocracy & bourgeoisie)
- Smith & Ricardo
 - 1. Productive class (workers)
 - 2. Entrepreneurs
 - 3. Land owners
- Switch in the theory of value from nature to labor: Labor theory of value.

The image shows a historical French economic table titled "TABLEAU ECONOMIQUE" by Quesnay. It is a complex flowchart showing the relationship between "Dépenses Productives" (productive expenditures) and "Dépenses Steriles" (sterile expenditures) across various categories like "Productions", "Ouvrages etc.", and "Revenu". The table uses a zigzag pattern of lines to connect values between different classes and their respective outputs and inputs. The top section lists 13 types of objects with their uses, and the main body consists of several columns of data points connected by lines.

Quesnay. Tableau économique (Zigzag=), *Éléments de la philosophie rurale* (1767)

Marx: Class relationships as exploitation

- “Mystery” of surplus value [fr: *plus-value*]
 - Merchant exchange: C(ommodity)-M(oney)-C [fr: *M(archandise)-A(rgent)-M*]
 - Capitalist cycle: M-C-M' [fr: *A-M-A'*] with $M' > M$
- Labor theory value to solve its “secret”
 - Value of C = quantity of labor to produce it
 - Value of Labor force = quantity of labor to re-produce it (food, and basic goods)
- Demiurgic nature of labor: Labor force produces more goods than the goods necessary to reproduce it
 - Production – reproduction of labor force = surplus-value ; appropriated by the capitalist.
- Capitalism is based on exploitation and class struggle on the share of value
 - Exploitation as powerful tool of social critique (Boltanski & Chiapello, 1999)



May 1968 poster

Capitalism as a mode of production

- Marx's goal: critique of political economy. Not just an economic analysis à la Ricardo
 - Capitalism's as a specific mode of production
 - A way of sharing surplus labor [*surtravail*]
 - Modes of production/ both economic and “symbolic”: rests on an ownership structure
- Primitive communism modes of production
 - No property. No overwork
- Asiatic mode of production
 - A despot (Gengis-Khan) owns everything (people and land) who works for her/him
- Slave-owned mode of production
 - Master own the slaves who works for her/him
- Feudal mode of production
 - Lords partial ownership of serves who works for her/him
- Capitalist mode of production
 - Capitalist owns capital
 - Worker own nothing but her/his labor force
 - “Free” contractual exchange
 - “Free fox in the free henhouse”
 - Does violence stop playing a role in capitalist exploitation?
 - Violence in primitive capitalist accumulation
 - Enclosure; colonialism; slavery
 - Military/police monopoly of violence to protect the bourgeois order

From economic classes to social classes

- Hegelian distinction between in itself [*en soi*] and for itself [*pour soi*]
 - Object vs Subject
- Class for itself. Acting as a historical actor
 - Class-consciousness
 - Mobilization
 - Unions and strikes
 - Workers party
- Active role in class struggle
- “Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The combination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle, of which we have noted only a few phases, this mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a **class for itself**. The interests it defends become class interests. But the struggle of class against class is a political struggle.”
- “*La domination du capital a créé à cette masse une situation commune, des intérêts communs. Ainsi cette masse est déjà une classe vis-à-vis du capital, mais pas encore pour elle-même. Dans la lutte, dont nous n’avons signalé que quelques phases, cette masse se réunit, elle se constitue en **classe pour elle-même**. Les intérêts qu’elle défend deviennent des intérêts de classe. Mais la lutte de classe à classe est une lutte politique.*” (Marx, 1847)

Social classes in historical capitalism

- Economic analysis of capitalism
 - 2 (or 3) classes: proletariat, bourgeoisie (& landowners)
- Journalist/historical work: more classes and fraction of classes
- 18th brumaire: 7 classes or subclasses. Financial aristocracy, industrial bourgeoisie, petite-bourgeoisie, working class, Lumpenproletariat, smallholding farmers [*paysannerie parcellaire*], large landowners.
 - Opposition of different groups of the bourgeoisie on the regime
 - Landowners → Pro Bourbon VS Industrial & financial bourgeoisie → Pro Orléans
 - Louis-Napoleon as a personal populist who plays the class divisions
 - Promising Napoleonic prosperity to smallholding farmers (which not a class in itself)
 - And military jobs to Lumpenproletariat, serving as his army



Daumier, 1848. Victor HUGO et émile GIRARDIN cherchent à élever le prince Louis sur un pavois, ça n'est pas très solide !

Marx & Engels' communist horizon



- Deepening of capitalist contradictions
 - Private property & socialization of means of production
 - Pauperization (absolute &/or relative)
 - Increased polarization of capitalist societies between proletariat & bourgeoisie
 - Disappearance of the petty bourgeoisie
- Revolution as (a Hegelian) solution
 - Modeled on the successful French Bourgeois Revolution and Paris' *commune* (1871)
 - Stage 1: Socialism
 - Proletariat dictatorship.
 - Socialization of the means of production (and ending private property of it)
 - Stage 2: Communism
 - Abolition of social classes and State:

Castellani. 1883. *Le Dernier jour de la Commune*

Is capitalism really leading to polarization?

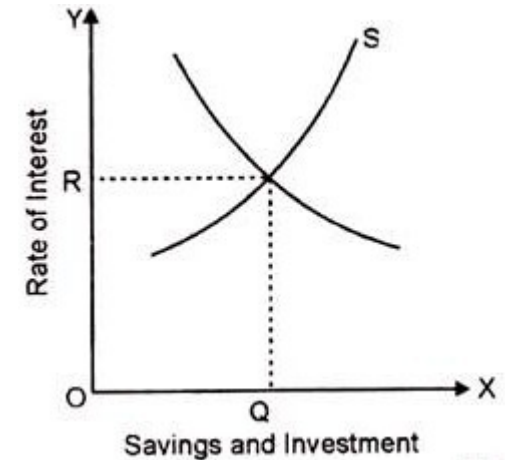
- Problem 1. Increase in the service sector
 - Only industrial working class is productive
 - Service sector viewed as mostly unproductive
- Problem 2. Increase in middle management
 - Managers, engineers, supervisors, accountants, etc.
 - Class position? Class interest?
 - Limit to the polarization thesis
- Switching the goal: From revolution to evolution
 - Eduard Bernstein:
- Changing the historical actor
 - Alain Touraine: New social mobilizations



Sempé.

Differences with modern economic thought

- Based on labor theory of value (just like Ricardo)
- Inconsistency & difficulty reconciling completely labor value theory and monetary prices
 - “Transformation problem”
 - “Marx Error” (Bortkiewicz, 1907)
 - Various solutions: Sraffa (1960), Morishima (1973), Lipietz (1981)
- No theory of “interest” as the price for renouncing consumption

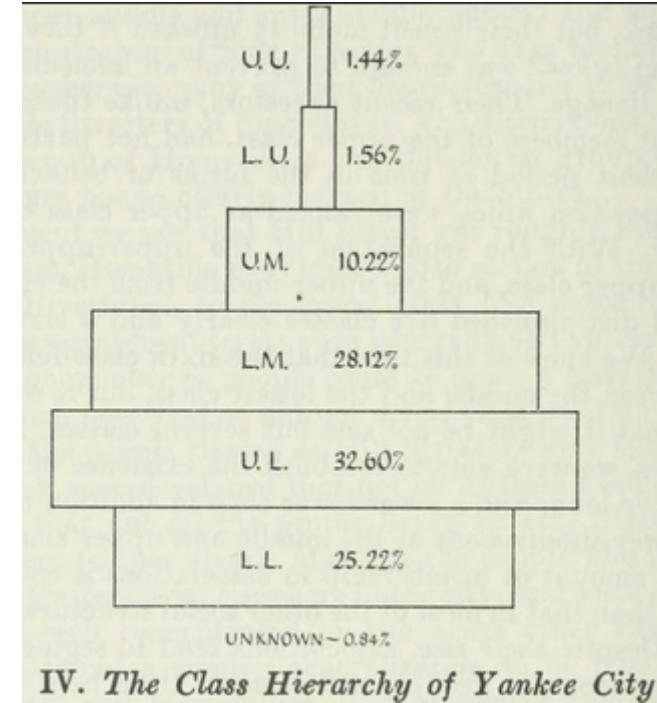


Max Weber: class within pluri-dimensional hierarchies

- Descriptive typologies of classes in economic terms
 - Distinction of ownership and production classes
 - Ownership classes: defined by ownership or lack of.
 - Production classes: defined by position in the production process
 - Social classes: as a combination of ownership & production classes
 - Working class/Petty bourgeoisie / Property less intelligentsia & specialists / Privileged class through property and education
- Class is not the only way of stratifying for Weber
 - → Status group

Warner and Yankee City

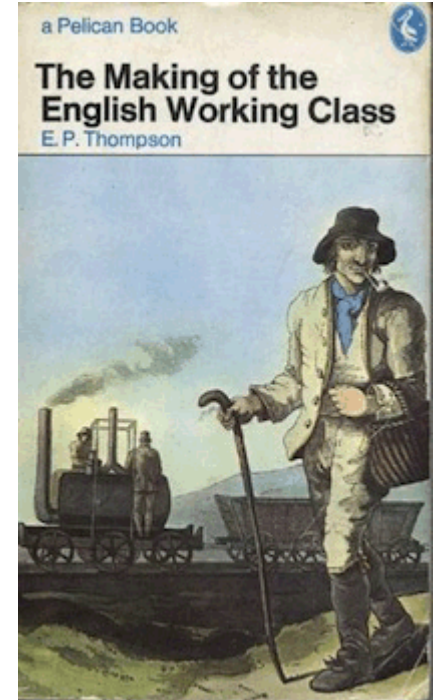
- Studies of stratification Newburyport (North of Boston) between 1930 & 1935. 5 books published between 1941 & 1959
- Asked to “informers” to put people into class based on prestige
- Further rationalized into classes based on 4 criteria (occupation, income, neighborhood, type of housing)
- 3 × 2 classes: Upper/Middle/Lower (all divided in upper and lower)
- Class scheme based on status, reputation (and to some extent life style)
- Not based on economic position ≠ Marx (& Weber)
 - Hierarchized differences in status but No “class struggle” and “exploitation”.



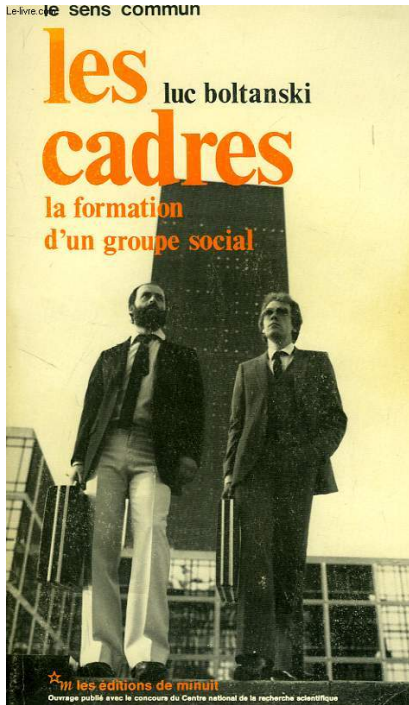
Class and percentage	Identification	Social characteristics
Upper-upper class (1.44%)	“Social aristocracy”. Established wealthy families, since several generations	High WASP, social closure, endogamy
Lower-upper class (1.56%)	Recent fortunes, nouveaux riches	Imitates upper-upper class but lack of distinction
Upper-middle class (10.22%)	Well-off middle class. Business persons. Professionals	Active in the city’s affairs, claim and exercise social responsibility, respected,
Lower-middle class (23.12%)	Petty bourgeoisie. Small entrepreneurs, merchants, white collar with confirmed status	Showing off morality, quest of respect, searching for success
Upper-lower class (32.6%)	Honest lower class: small merchants, small clerks and skilled blue collar	Modest and decent lifestyle. Considered honest and respectable.
Lower-lower class (25.2%)	Precarious population. Seasonal workers, frequent unemployment, high proportion of minorities (Blacks, Italians, ...)	Socially downgraded. Bad housing, “asocial” or “antisocial” behaviors

Constructivist approaches of social classes

- Marx realist approach: political importance of class consciousness, but primacy of economics
 - Historian Thompson bring people back and their agency. How workers actively created their class through political mobilization. (Jacobin and luddite radicalism)
- → Constructivist: Classes do not exist *per se*, but are socially constructed, through process of categorization
- Class theories have a “performative” effect:
 - “Like the phrase, ‘the meeting is open’, the thesis, ‘there are two classes’, may be understood a constative utterance or as a performative utterance.” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 134)



A French specificity: The *Cadres* (Boltanski, 1982)



- A deliberately constructivist approach
 - *Cadres* do not exist *per se* or as a result of the capitalist system. Specific to French society (very heterogeneous: diploma, position in hierarchy, etc.). → Historical construct
- 1930s and the temptation of the 3rd way
 - Middle classes unsatisfied and feeling misrepresented by unions
 - Looking for a political/social third way, between classes (working class/capitalists) and regimes (socialism/capitalism)
 - But divided between self-employed and salaried middle class
 - 1936. First collective agreements. Codification of salaried middle class
- 1945, WW2 aftermath
 - Salaried middle-classes refuse a universal social security system
 - Specific social security: AGIRC/ARCCO, relying on status expressed in collective agreements
 - Generates status & identity

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