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## Class Versus Stratification

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### ABSTRACT

Two main approaches to social differentiation, i.e. social class and social stratification are oftentimes conflated with each other; in particular, behind the terminology of stratification the conceptual framework of class theory is in fact hiding in many cases. Meanwhile, the distinction between the two aforementioned perspectives needs to be maintained. First, social classes, as conceived of in the writings of Karl Marx and Max Weber, are inherently economic groupings, which also means that class theories, in their classic renderings, do not commit the fallacy of classism, which posits that each and every member of a given society must be a member of a class. However, it is the alternative approach to societal differentiation that is marked by the said deficiency, as social strata can encompass people from all walks of life. Relatedly, social stratification is universal as regards not only social space but also social time-according to the conventional wisdom, there is no human society that would be not subject to some form of stratification; meanwhile, social classes arise at a certain stage of historical development and at least in theory one could imagine conditions for the classless societies to exist. As its very name suggest, stratification is irrevocably hierarchical in character, whereas the shape of class relations is, by and large, a more complex one. Relatedly, most, if not all, scales of income, prestige, and other criteria used within the stratification approach are marked by arbitrariness, which error is far easier to avoid in class theories, based-as they do-on some qualitative factors, such as property relations.

**Keywords:** Marx, Weber, Warner, Davis and Moore, Homans, a historicity

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The paper argues that not only social stratification should be distinguished from social class as a theoretical perspective (which by itself may be controversial for some), but that a common error in the social-scientific literature consists in using the term of class in contexts wherein the concept of social stratum would be far more suitable.

## **2. CONCEPTUAL ASYMMETRY**

Among the available perspectives on social differentiation there obtains indeed a certain asymmetry-many class approaches by name turn out, upon scrutiny, fit into an alternative framework of social stratification. Interestingly, while it is only seldom that one can come across what is in actual fact a class approach, but couched in stratification terms, the reverse is quite often the case.

This fact by itself, however, does not, of course, transform Warner, Parsons or any other exponent of stratification, employing the language of class into a class theorist in the proper sense of the word. The former, for example, states: no teacher teaches us the hard facts of our social-class system.

It is time we learn all of the basic facts of our status system and learn them through systematic, explicit training which will teach at least the adult student much of what he needs to know about our status order, how it operates. how he fits into the system, and what he should do to improve his position or make his present one more tolerable. This book presents basic materials about social class in America, tells how to identify the several levels, and describes the movement from lower levels to higher ones” (Warner, Meeker, Eels 1960).

In a fairly typical, alas, textbook definition class is described as “a ranked group within a stratified society characterized by achieved status and considerable social mobility” (Brym 2003).

To make the matter worse, the above definition not only reduces the concept of class to that of stratum, but additionally supplements it with the criterion of high social mobility, which may or may not pertain to the particular socio-historical class structures. In feudalism, for example, such mobility was very low, which does not at all alter the fact that the feudal society was a class one. Interestingly enough, the source mentioned above in another definition comes to the same conclusion, as it defines “Open Class System” as a “Stratification system that facilitates social mobility, with individual achievement and personal merit determining social rank” (Brym 2003).

It only adds to the existing confusion that sometimes the reverse thing happens, that is, scholars subscribing to the stratification perspective, actually speak the language of class; a case in point is the following passage by two Greek researchers: “three main strata: The upper stratum is represented by the most prosperous peasants, large storekeepers or merchants and professionals, like doctors, teachers, governmental officials etc.

In the middle stratum, there is to be found the bulk of farm owners, small storekeepers and a limited number of skilled workers who may also live in the village.

Finally, the lower stratum consists of the propertyless farm labourers and the ‘outcasts’ of the village (Mouzelis and Attalides 1979: 183).

The alleged strata are in fact, true, not particularly precisely defined, social classes.

Another researcher refers to her subject interchangeably, as if both terms involved had the same content, which in fact is not the case: "Results from hierarchical linear models indicate that differentiation has a democratizing effect on access to higher education: it increases overall enrollment as well as decreases the gap in enrollment between different social strata. Moreover, differentiation does not disproportionately divert students from less privileged family backgrounds from 4-year institutions—it actually diminishes the role of social class in access to 4-year colleges and universities" (Roksa 2008).

Considering that "socioeconomic background (SES) SES is measured as a standardized composite of parent's education, occupation and income" (Roksa 2008), the former label is proper, while the latter is not. This kind of approach is common, which does not mean proper, all the more that it often involves logical fallacies, as in the following case in which class has been defined through income so that the author's contentions in the later part of the quotation make little sense, being analytic propositions, as opposed to synthetic; "the primary measure of class I adapt in this study is income. Given that some other scholars see a tighter connection between education and class, I also consider educational attainment" (Landry 1987). After all, to compare an income-based and education-based definitions is like comparing apples with oranges.

Yet another theorist fails to notice his statement contains a contradiction—he first offers a fairly correct (albeit not escaping tautology) definition of stratification as composed of "strata" only to give a definition of class that is indistinguishable from that of social strata: "Social stratification refers to the division of a society into layers (or strata) whose occupants have unequal access to social opportunities and rewards.

People in the top strata enjoy power, prosperity, and prestige that are not available to other members of society; people in the bottom strata endure penalties that other members of society escape. In a stratified society, inequality is part of the social structure and passes from one generation to the next" (Long 2013). Block quote end [...] What is a Class? block quote. People who occupy the same layer of the socioeconomic hierarchy are known as a social class (Bassis, et al. 1990: 216). According to Henslin (2004: 192), a social class is a large group of people who rank closely to one another in wealth, power, and prestige. Henslin (1999: 253) suggests that researchers can assign people to various social classes based on objective criteria involving wealth, power, and prestige. Some objective indicators can include occupation, educational level, number of dependents, type of residence, infant mortality, and life expectancy rates.

### **3. KEY DIFFERENCES**

What are, then the most crucial differences between strata and classes?

Differentia specifica of a class is the fact that it is a social group rooted in the economic structure, whereas, by definition, it is not necessarily the case as regards social strata.

With all their differences (which often are overplayed) the only two classical theories of class—i.e. those developed by Marx and Weber—share this basic insight that class is an economic concept. Therefore, Haller (1970) was off the mark in his interpretation of the Weberian revision of the basic Marxian model as emphasizing "relationships among social units whose incumbents are unequal in wealth, power, or prestige ... [variables that] constitute the minimum set of hierarchical inequalities which apparently discriminate among

all peoples" (Haller 2004); for his interpretation squeezes Weber's class theory into the straightjacket of stratification, which is totally inadmissible. Moreover, in another context the same researcher goes even further, extending his reductionist approach onto Marx: "the three content dimensions of status which appear to be universal are wealth, power and prestige, as consistent with the early writings on stratification by classical sociologists (Marx & Weber, in particular)" (Haller 2004).

Thus, whilst social stratification, as even its name suggests, forms always a hierarchy, interclass relations are more complex and hence it is only seldom that a class structure may take a ladder-like shape. This much is pointed out by Wright: "Both Marx and Weber adopt relational concepts of class. Neither define classes simply as nominal levels on some gradational hierarchy. For both, classes are derived from an account of systematic interactions of social actors situated in relation to each other. Classes for both Weber and Marx are thus not primarily identified by quantitative names like upper, upper middle, middle, lower middle, and lower, but by qualitative names like capitalists and workers, debtors and creditors" (2002). This claim, however, falls short of an open admission that this gradational or nominal approach is not a class one at all, for it pertains to social stratification, as defined, in a typical formulation, as follows: "even the most egalitarian societies have some hierarchical structure, and in all democracies there are distinctions on the basis of education, income, occupation, cultural differences, and social mores related to prior schooling and membership in faith-based and many other institutions of society. Inevitably, some of these are perceived as having higher social standing than others; thus "social stratification" is a useful term to describe them" (Dictionary of Public Health 2013).

#### **4. INDISTINCT DISTINCTION OR THE PERILS OF HIERARCHY**

How easily this hierarchical perspective can be adopted by such thinkers who are commonly considered as class theorists, the case of Pierre Bourdieu shows.

The Bourdesian class structure is a factorial space constituted by three orthogonal axes. The first (and most important) axis differentiates locations in the occupational system according to the total volume of what Bourdieu terms capital (economic and cultural) possessed by incumbents. For Bourdieu, class location is a function of position on this axis. To illustrate, his data purportedly indicate that members of occupational categories such as industrialists, private sector executives, and college professors occupy overlapping positions at the upper end of the axis, and hence share the same class location; Bourdieu thus refers to these categories collectively as the "dominant class" (or sometimes the "bourgeoisie"). In turn, manual workers and farm laborers- which in conjunction form the so-called popular classes ("les classes populaires")-occupy overlapping positions at the other end of the axis, indicating that they share a class location opposed to the occupations making up the dominant class; In between, we find overlapping occupational categories such as small business owners, technicians, secretaries, and primary school teachers, which are collectively termed the "petty bourgeoisie" (cf. Bourdieu 1984 (1979): 128-9).

The second axis in the factorial space differentiates positions within class locations. Bourdieu frames opposed positions along this axis in terms of "class fractions", which is usually regarded as a Marxist category. WEININGER points out, though, that "this terminology, however, should not be interpreted according to Marxian theories, as the

meaning he attributes to it falls well outside the scope of Marxism" (2005: 88). Indeed, from the viewpoint of French sociologist, classes are divided internally according to the composition of the capital held by incumbents - that is, the relative preponderance of economic or cultural capitals within "the set of actually usable resources and powers" (Bourdieu 1984:114). Thus, occupational categories within the dominant class are differentiated from one another in such a way that professors and "artistic producers" - the occupations whose incumbents hold the greatest cultural capital and the least economic capital - are opposed to industrialists and commercial employers - the occupations whose incumbents hold a preponderance of economic capital but relatively little cultural capital. Located in between these two polar extremes are the professions, whose incumbents exhibit a relatively symmetrical asset structure.

In a similar vein, the petty bourgeoisie is differentiated along the second axis between the small business owners, endowed primarily with economic capital, and primary school teachers, endowed primarily with cultural capital. Intermediate between them are categories such as technicians, office workers, and secretaries.

In addition, the occupational division of labor is differentiated along a third axis, one which attempts at some kind of dynamic approach. On the basis of indicators of the two forms of capital of the family of origin, this axis differentiates positions according to the trajectories followed by their incumbents - or in other words, according to the change or stability they have experienced over time in the volume and composition of their capital. For example, according to Bourdieu's data, members of the professions are more likely than any other members of the bourgeoisie to have been born into this class.

Even at this point it is evident what havoc can "capital" concepts wreak on a conceptual framework-in this particular instance blurring the line between the economic and the non-economic, which finds expression in the estate of teachers being reclassified as a social class, although this status pertains only to that minority that are employed at privately held establishments. Arguably, Bourdieu's conception is in part at least a misconception in that, its Marxist-like terminology notwithstanding, both its lack of specifically economic locus and gradational character (e.g. in the form of the aforementioned tripartite hierarchy). show it is consistent with the core principles of social stratification.

Bourdieu adds yet another argument justifying the contention associating his approach to societal differentiation with stratification. Namely, the author of "Distinction"-contrary to what the title of his work implies, as it were-rejects one of the most basic objectives of class theory, consisting in drawing -on the basis of well specified theoretical premises-clear dividing lines between classes. The reasons behind this rejection are worth noting, too:

[n] umerous studies of "social classes" ... merely elaborate the practical questions which are forced on those who hold political power. Political leaders are continually faced with the ... practical imperatives which arise from the logic of the struggle within the political field, such as... the need to mobilize the greatest possible number of votes while at the same time asserting the irreducibility of their project to those of other leaders. Thus they are condemned to raise the problem of the social world in the typically substantialist logic of the boundaries between groups and the size of the mobilizable group... (Bourdieu 1991: 246)

Well, Bourdieu's credentials as a sociologist of knowledge are not to be taken for granted. The above argument, reducing-as it does-theoretical considerations to simply political convenience constitutes an incredible over-simplification and crude vulgarisation of

the question, thus echoing Stalinist intellectual abuses (which, needless to say, could have fatal consequences).

Bourdieu's justification for discarding any sort of theoretical specification of whatever boundaries may separate particular classes from one another is hardly convincing. As WEININGER (2005) clarifies, for Bourdieu "argumentation over the boundary separating one social collectivity from another is a fundamental form of political conflict, and Bourdieu adhered throughout his career to a vision of social science which repudiated the amalgamation of political and scientific interest". Now, this makes Bourdieu's overall sociological credentials look even more suspect-the association (or lack thereof) between theory and the political process cannot be predetermined by the creator of the former, as it is always decided by the concrete historical context, the resultant being, of course, mediated by the theory concerned. Meanwhile, the French scholar kind of turns the above argument on its head, claiming -as he does-that the procedure of theoretically based class delimitation leads to framing classes as "self to -subsistent entities ... which come 'preformed,' and only then... enter into) dynamic flows..." (Emirbayer 1997: 283). We are told that "both of these objections stem[...] from Bourdieu's antipathy towards arguments (frequent during the 1960s and 1970s) over the 'real' lines of division separating classes -above all, those separating the middle class from the proletariat - and the political implications of the location of these lines" (WEININGER 2005).

What lies behind the above named claims of the French theorist is in fact a Heraclitean vision of the world as an incessant flow without any discernible structures; in which everything is and is not, for everything is fluid, is constantly changing, constantly coming into being and passing away. Only in this way can one make sense of the aforementioned attack on the very idea of structural demarcation as leading of necessity to a static, or at best pseudo-dynamic view of things.

Meanwhile, this private opinion on the relation between the structural and the dynamic ought to remain what it actually is-an idiosyncratic idea, galvanising some ancient antinomies and completely ignoring advances of modern science, which refute the said view once and for all. Even if experimental physics tells us that the lifespan of, say, an elementary particle amounts to fractions of seconds, this does not alter the fact that during that time period-however short it would be-the entity in question exists as a definite whole, structure, differing from its environment. What processes it is subsequently subject to does not matter from this point of view; similarly, social classes may grow, shrink, even annihilate one another, but this does not negate the validity of distinguishing them in the first place. Quite the contrary, it stands to REASON THAT without the latter step, any dynamic or diachronic investigation would be impossible.

It is probably worthwhile to mention that the property of Bourdieu's approach identified above has been, however reluctantly, conceded also by his followers.

Thus, WEININGER(2005:90) in his mostly hagiographic account argues, inter alia, that "Bourdieu's social space is separated from the more familiar traditions of class analysis by the fact that the three axes which constitute it - volume, composition, and trajectory -are viewed as continuous dimensions, from both a methodological and a theoretical vantage point" (Bourdieu 1990 (1980): 140). By the same token he admits: "This implies that the model does not postulate any inherent lines of cleavage specifying the structural threshold where one class gives way to another", and hence-that "within 'this universe of continuity' the identification of

discrete class (and fraction) locations amounts to no more than a heuristic convenience" (see Bourdieu 1984 (1979): 258-9, 339).

The benignant commentator takes, however, the French scholar's side, arguing " although the fact that Bourdieu conceptualizes social space in gradational terms appears to echo those 'stratification' models in which the occupational order is understood as a continuous scale of positions (differentiated, for example, in terms of the rewards they carry), it nevertheless stands far apart from them by virtue of its multidimensional configuration (see Bourdieu 1984 (1979): 124-5; also 1991: 244-5).

This loyalty is, sure enough, moving, but it ignores the undeniable fact that stratification may as well appear in the form of a multidimensional scale, as has been pointed out above.

However, there is a grain of truth to the above defense in the sense that the Bourdesian framework cannot be entirely brought down to just a plain scale, (on which individuals are placed in terms of their possession of more or fewer elements of capital, or rather its two/three forms), wherein The relation between the particular cells or classes is of necessity gradational, and the break-off points between the latter arbitrary. This is the case because of a close affinity between the Bourdesian thought and the tradition of conflict theory, which engenders new problems, though, as Bourdieu laid out what may be called a pan-agonistic approach, overplaying the role of such phenomena as struggle, conflict, etc. in social life.

Thus, the composition of the legitimate culture is the object of a perpetual struggle. By way of illustration, when apprehended in relation to the underlying habitus that generated them, the characteristic minutiae of the bourgeois style of eating and the working-class style of eating amount to nothing less than "two antagonistic world views, ... two representations of human excellence" (Bourdieu 1984 (1979): 199).

Relatedly, a parallel aspect of Bourdieu's framework is his rather loose or fuzzy use of the concept of power; there is power as such, political power and economic power in connection with which one wonders if it really constitutes the primary objective of economic agents. What about profit, capital accumulation and pay as the ends of various classes? An even more serious weakness of Bourdieu's otherwise interesting notion of the field is its lack of clear explanation of the relationship between it and the concept of structure. Bourdieu once used the two concepts in a parallel way; at other times he spoke of the structure of the field, and anything like convincing proof that his conceptual innovation allows one to say something about reality that cannot be said by means of the category of structure is missing.

Any misgivings about the use or misuse of the above concepts pale into insignificance, though, as compared with an almost magical ability with which Bourdieu would multiply the concept of all kinds of capital. In the panorama apart from the acceptable - as related to the economy - financial, commercial, technological and technical (what the difference between the two remains unexplained) capital there was no lack of - attributed to the state - "the capital of physical force", social capital to which Bourdieu claims copyright, cultural capital, supplemented with informational and scientific as well as symbolic capital (to which he claims an analogous copyright) and even such bizarre creations as legal capital.

Ironically, the author of a book under the same title, seems to fail to recognise the distinction between the particular and the general for, on the one hand, he associates the state with its specific capital in the form of force but simultaneously, on the other, states: "the different types of capital (or power, which amounts to the same thing)" (Bourdieu 1984). More broadly, this homogenising logic expresses, one is tempted to say "capitalism", but there is an akin term "imperialism" that better renders the quality of his approach. For Bourdieu, capital

acts as a social relation within a system of exchange and can be extended to “all the goods, material and symbolic, without distinction, that present themselves as rare and worthy of being sought after in a particular social formation” (Harker et al. 1990: 1).

Oomph! While in this competition he had many prominent rivals (including Nobel laureates), the French scholar outclassed them all, emerging as by far the most prolific to date manufacturer of "capitals".

And it is pertinent to note that many a mainstream economist is not happy with this economic imperialism in which a host of social scientists are today engaged. In Robert Solow’s opinion, for instance, the use of social capital is "an attempt to gain conviction from a bad analogy" (2000:6), mainly on the grounds that it does not represent a stock of anything and could not be measured by an accountant. A similar criticism against social capital is that "The concept is based on an outmoded concept; its similarity to the concept of capital is in style but not the substance" (Woolcock 2000).

Also to both social and cultural capital, to name those Bourdesian favourites, the following criticism applies, illuminating-as it does- the frequent fallacy of conflating belonging and impact-the fact that a given phenomenon or relation influences the economy does not by itself makes it an economic phenomenon; “The mechanism by which social capital is said to operate is often conceived of as one of direct cause.

This is a misconception. Networks and norms contribute to development, but are never sufficient and effect on their own and only act in combination with a number of other elements” (Neira, Portela 2005). More broadly, Baron and Hannan (1994: 1124) note that they are “baffled that sociologists have begun referring to virtually every social feature as a form of capital”.

The aforementioned list prompts one more conclusion, consistent with classifying Bourdieu's framework as akin to that of social stratification, as it shares with the latter its key feature-arbitrariness. Namely, looking at the myriad of "capitals" available, one wonders why some of them, and not others have been chosen as determinants of class.

Ironically, we may be grateful to the French author for his lack of consistency-it is easy to imagine what chaos would have ensued had Bourdieu in fact incorporated the complete set of his forms of capital in the theory of social differentiation inasmuch as working with a limited set produces such a mishmash:

"the opposition between the ‘elite’ of the dominant and the ‘mass’ of the dominated, a contingent, disorganised multiplicity, interchangeable and innumerable, existing only statistically;

“the dominant fraction of the dominant class”;

“the major relations of order (high/low, strong/weak etc.) reappear in all class-divided societies (Bourdieu 1984: 466).

## **5. ESSENTIALISTS STRUCTURALISM**

Notice that the choice of terms deployed by Bourdieu in the above citation points to his dependency on another anthropologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and more broadly, the entire French structuralism, which current had been very influential in this country (and beyond), including its Marxist branch: Louis Althusser's school. This is highly relevant to grasping some fundamental properties of Bourdieu's thought, as the aforementioned intellectual stream



can be charged with formalism, stretched to the point of dogmatic rigidity, and epistemological idealism-in the sense of SUBORDINATING reality to a concept. In exactly the same vein „IN" Distinction Bourdieu's purpose is to show that the various indicators of lifestyle exhibit a structure that is -as he would have it-"homologous" to) that of social space. This implies that different preferences and practices cluster in different sectors of social space (Bourdieu 1998b (1994): 4-6).

As a next step, Bourdieu brings out what he terms the particular "scheme" or "principle" that underlies them, and which orients the expenditure of economic and cultural capital in a manner that supposedly gives rise to the semantic coherence of a lifestyle. In his view then, amongst the members of the dominant class, a unitary lifestyle emerges around what he calls "the sense of distinction." This habitus is defined, above all, by its overriding aesthetic sensibility.

From such premises an extremely schematic exposition emerges, bringing to mind the worst excesses of Stalinist Marxism, Zhdanov style as Sulkunen (1982) clarifies, "the homology principle means simply that the habitus integrates different aspects of the life-style: taste in dietary patterns, housing patterns, style of dressing, aesthetic codes, etc. into a consistent whole. Thus the same principles (or meaning structures) that appear in working class clothing should be found in its dietary patterns and artistic taste".

Thus, The reader is told that the working class is characterised by the primacy of function over form-as opposed to the bourgeoisie.

The entire description is built on this single tone-opposition(as the reader is reminded below, this was, of course, the flagship notion of the structuralist framework) between two major classes, with the petty bourgeoisie occupying an intermediate position. In a manner characteristic of structural formalism, Bourdieu overplays the opposition in question, which in conjunction with his programmatic anti-empiricism that does not preclude, but conversely, implies that many empirical facts are smuggled in by the backdoor, thus fortifying the "glocalised" quality of Bourdesian schemata-in the sense of an unstated localism of global aspirations, which precisely by virtue of that cryptic, as opposed to open, dependence upon concrete facts are doomed to failure. For instance, in Bourdieu's ahistorical view, the working class' incapacity to participate in the race to claim those forms of culture whose legitimacy its members nonetheless acknowledge (at least implicitly) is so severe that they may be said to be "imbued with a sense of their cultural unworthiness" (Bourdieu 1984 [1979]: 251).

By contrast, according to Bourdieu "the petty bourgeois exhibits a lifestyle born of the combination of an aspiration to the bourgeois lifestyle, on the one hand, and insufficient economic or (especially) cultural capital to attain it, on the other. Its members are therefore inclined to a 'cultural goodwill': lacking "culture" (in the bourgeois sense) they tend to embrace 'popu-larized' aesthetic forms (e.g. 'light' opera)" (WEININGER 2005).

And the fact of the matter is that Remarks that MOVE beyond the confines of that matrix primarily serve to vindicate our earlier criticism; Bourdieu's contention that the working class stands out by its "demand of choices that evidence a conformity with the class as a whole (which are viewed as an implicit demonstration of solidarity)" (WEININGER 2005) remains unexplained, which is by any means surprising, given that such an explanation would in all likelihood call for his backing out of his own claim concerning the alleged irrelevance of the workplace as a condition for forming the said

It is paradoxical that the same scholar argued against using any deductive knowledge for the purpose of drawing a picture of a class structure. Meanwhile, it is the same Pierre

Bourdieu, who does not shy away from exactly the practice he elsewhere condemns-his discourse is structured by the supreme principle of homology, the upshot being a blatantly essentialist reasoning, with any empirical evidence that might prove pertinent pushed aside.

And this is potentially damaging for, *inter alia*, the Bourdesian argument on the primacy of consumption over work, as the role of the workplace in creating and maintaining some, if not most of the phenomena underlined by Bourdieu is a priori left out of the picture. Not considering the possibility that workers' habitus, and thereby its effects are created and reproduced in the workplace leaves the book open to questions regarding the accuracy of the empirical story, which otherwise should come as no surprise at all, given his self-confessed "anti-empiricism"(Sulkunen 1982), echoing the same attribute pertaining to the most prominent structuralist of them all, at least as cultural or social anthropology is concerned.

After all, the flip side of any essentialism-all the more of structuralism-inspired one -is its tendency toward reductionism, which is also noted by Catherine Belsey, who points to "the structuralist danger of collapsing all difference" (1983: 17).

Owing to its importance, we deal with the topic of the close affinity between Bourdieu and the French variety of structuralism, but at this juncture the reader's attention should be drawn to Claude Lévi-Strauss' (1962) treatment of the rules that govern social action (what he calls schemas, which term we literally find with Bourdieu) as generalizable procedures for the reproduction and enactment of social life. They make up structures.

Not only the above case shows that the importance of the distinction between social strata and classes cannot be over-estimated, given how often it is not observed: e.g., "Class is no longer simply a vertical ranking linked to capital and a system of production in some way" (Dorling 2013), as if it could ever be brought down to such a ranking. Similarly, the essential distinction noted above is completely erased in the following statement: "theories of social inequality as well as its more modern derivatives explain themes which all display an interest in the vertical nature of social class or strata and the relation of individuals or groups to differences in property and its cost, including the wages derived from the property of labor power. The result of the basic premise of theories of inequality in industrial society is that social hierarchies in the final analysis always are generated and legitimized with reference to the productive process and its organization. This implies that inequality becomes directly or indirectly a function of the relation of the individual to work or capital and its benefits in the form of monetary income, interest, rent and profit. The identity of individuals is mediated or even determined by their relation to the work process. Social strata and classes form in the same manner. In short, as both Marxist and non-Marxist approaches suggest, industrial society is still primarily a society of labor. This suggests strongly, to social scientists at least in the case of the analysis of social inequality in some contemporary societies, that social hierarchies still are shaped predominantly by class rather than other forms of social cleavage" (Stehr 1999).

And even well-known Marxist authors can, by applying the term "class" in relation to what actually constitutes stratification, legitimise the latter confusing usage: "'Class' is also allowed to be used with limited application when it is part of the holy trinity of race, gender, and class. Used in that way, it is reduced to a demographic trait related to life style, education level, and income level. In forty years of what was called 'identity politics' and 'culture wars,' class as a concept was reduced to something of secondary importance. All sorts of 'leftists' told us how we needed to think anew, how we had to realize that class was not as important as race or gender or culture.

I was one of those who thought these various concepts should not be treated as being mutually exclusive of each other. In fact, they are interactive. Thus racism and sexism have always proved functional for class oppression. Furthermore, I pointed out (and continue to point out), that in the social sciences and among those who see class as just another component of 'identity politics', the concept of class is treated as nothing more than a set of demographic traits" (Parenti 2011).

Interestingly enough, though, for all his criticism toward the said understanding of class, Parenti does not go as far as to call into question the very practice of using the term concerned in the context of the framework reprovved. The reason may lie in certain shortcomings to his own position. Parenti formulates his criticism from the perspective of Marxist relational framework, using, however, the imprecise term "the relation to the means of production" which may refer to an ownership relation, but also to, e.g., the division of labour couched in technical terms.

The latter would suggest an approach much closer to Goldthorpe than Marx. By contrast, from the perspective of ownership, and more precisely ownership of labour power, one can theorise some key aspects of impact of ethnic origin, sex, age, etc. on the economic structure, in which, recall, classes are rooted. In the context of the process of hiring, which in our terms-explicated at more length later in the text-should be recast as leasing, one could distinguish two basic types of labour power: one can get a job on the basis of certain objective, independent of a given specific context criteria, such as personality tests (of course, we are fully aware that the aforementioned "objectivity" is very, very contingent, and psychological tests may well reflect some Western stereotypes and biases and thereby favour, say, Caucasians over individuals of other races, but we leave at this point such considerations aside for the sake of argument), which could be conceptualised in terms of universalistic labour power.

By contrast, other prospective employees become them in actuality by virtue of personal connections, and their personal ascriptive characteristics, such as the colour of skin, sex, or what you. These individuals could be said to hold an alternative type of labour power-a particularistic one. The contrast in question is nicely captured by a study whose authors report: "the analysis of personnel policies among our sample firms reveals two distinct models. Some firms adopt a performance model, whereby managers are hired through formal channels, they are assessed regularly and rewarded, promoted, and dismissed on the basis of objective measures of performance. Other firms instead adopt a fidelity model of managerial talent development: they hire managers on the basis of personal or family contacts, they do not assess the managers' performance formally, and managers' rewards are based on the quality of their relationship with the firm's owners.

The analysis also reveals that non-family firms and multinationals are more likely to adopt the performance model, whereas family firms and firms that operate exclusively in the domestic market tend to adopt the fidelity model" (Bori et al. 2010).

Positive or negative discrimination on the basis of some ascribed traits may, sure enough, work in relation to many other aspects of work: job promotion, pay policy, etc. So, the notion of labour power as an object of economic ownership enables us to capture some key channels in which the factors mentioned earlier, and other unmentioned at that point, are manifested in the context of economic structure; it is clear that not only there is no opposition between the notion of class and those other concepts, but conversely, it is the former notion that allows for a scientific, empirical investigation of links between the latter factors and

the economy. More broadly, this was just an example of how one could inquire into the societal efficacy of the above-mentioned factors, so often and so wrongly pitted against class; Age, gender, and race/ethnicity have long been regarded as the holy trinity of status distinctions that intersect with, reinforce, and sometimes undercut class-based distinctions (Gurin, Miller, & Gurin, 1980; Parsons, 1942; Wright & Perrone, 1977).

The inadequacy of Parenti's approach is manifested precisely in his one-sided treatment of the relation between class, race and sex. He highlights in this context the concept of interaction, but interactionism is not the same as dialectics; from the latter viewpoint, it is not simply that one has two factors influencing each other. Nor, too, the relation in question could be rendered by means of such concepts as determination in the last instance, over-determination and others popularised notably by Louis Althusser and his followers, which - owing most often to their formalism - are unable to reflect the all-important process of structural causation.

This cannot be brought down to any mechanical queue of "instances" which one after another come to the fore, occupying the position of over-determining forces. This is not dialectics but its parody. The point is that to explore, for example, race as both a causative force and one that is itself affected by definite societal structures one may not treat the former in isolation from the economy and its societal overlay, i.e. a class structure. As demonstrated in (xxx 2011a), the so-called primacy of the economy does not consist in it being some all-powerful and all-pervasive force, which at that maintains this capacity irrespective of its historical context. By contrast, what is indeed particular, pivotal position of the economic structure means simply that no phenomenon or process in a society can be scientifically examined without its reference to the former. This does not mean, mind you, anything like reduction; it is just a methodological directive-underlaid, to be sure, by definite ontological assumptions regarding the architecture of social reality, not to mention epistemological premises.

## **6. CLASS VS. STRATIFICATION AND CHAOS THEORY**

The distinction discussed above finds its confirmation in what for many will be an unlikely source, namely chaos theory championed by many postmodernist theorists (the truth of the matter is that the author of "Dialectics of Nature" would be first to embrace this analytic perspective as being a modern articulation of precisely the very dialectical approach Engels, Marx, Simmel and many others pursued so successfully). William Johnson and Michael Ornstein, (1980). compared several different approaches to the scanning for class dynamics in complex data sets. Those who used conventional measures of class standing (education, income, occupation, self-identification and such) were not able to locate such basins of attraction in national survey data. Those using other parameters (the ownership and control of production facilities, control over new capital investment, and control of the labour process itself), three researchers (Carchedi, Poulantzas and Wright) were able to find hidden attractors while those using conventional measures above, were not" (Young 1994).

This result is all the more remarkable that the theories chosen as an alternative to social stratification are far from being perfect.

## **7. RELEVANCE OF 'LABOUR POWER'**

To revert to the aforementioned comments on the distinction between class and stratification approaches, it is paradoxical that Wright's (who in the meantime has managed to show up also in Young's discussion) own work illustrates how in the absence of a solid theoretical foundation, verbal objections to the so-called gradational approach, matter little, as in practice their author himself invokes precisely this kind of viewing social differentiation, laying out " the hierarchy, with capitalists and managers at the top, followed by "A historically large and relatively stable middle class, anchored in an expansive and flexible system of higher education and technical training connected to jobs requiring credentials of various sorts, but whose security and future prosperity is now uncertain; A working class which once was characterized by a relatively large unionized segment with a standard of living and security similar to that of the middle class, but which now largely lacks these protections; A poor and precarious segment of the working class, characterized by low wages and relatively insecure employment, subjected to unconstrained job competition in the labour market, and with minimal protection from the state; A marginalized, impoverished part of the population, without the skills and education needed for jobs that would enable them to live above the poverty line, and living in conditions which make it extremely difficult to acquire those skills" (Wright 2009: 109).

If we were to treat originality as the paramount virtue of a scholarly work, then Wright's proposal does not fare on that account particularly well; in the literature similar schemata abound-similar also in respect of their drawbacks which they share with the classification outlined above. Those deficiencies concern first and foremost an inadequate theoretical grounding.

The concept of precariat in particular does not seem to be particularly well-founded, and in general, the all-important notion of labour power as an object of ownership receives no attention at all, which is especially striking in the context of formulations about "credentials" as a supposed class criterion (because of its evident relationship to the concept of labour power). More than that, the common, universally used term of labour market is an oxymoron. Labour is in actual fact not a market category at all; a worker cannot sell his or her labour for money revenues because simply, this labour is not yet in existence, it will come into being only after contracting for alienating the aforementioned labour power, or capacity to work, as distinct from actual work. Under capitalism, to earn income, an employee must agree to the labor conditions (including obedience to the rules and directives) of an employer who wants to utilise his or her labour power in a definite period of time.

This is not the end of the story however, as we believe that the concept of sale more commonly used by Marxist economists and sociologists (and with reference to labour instead of labour power-by non-Marxists alike), should be replaced by "the lease of labour power". Marx, underlining that in the case of labour power we are dealing with a commodity, always emphasizes that this is a peculiar commodity. And indeed, the peculiarities of that specific commodity, related to the fact that it is an inseparable part of human personality, are remarkable. Any other commodity, for example consumer goods purchased in a store, are wholly owned by the purchaser, who may deal with it at will (and, let us add, according to the popular legal notion of property), including for example, destruction, donation, etc. Meanwhile, there is no such a thing in relation to labour power, which is supposedly purchased by the employer. It can be utilized only in a certain way: consumed by the owner in

the production process or providing services, or more generally by servicing a given type of operating conditions. However, a capitalist cannot, for example, sell his or her worker or otherwise dispose of them. It results from the fact that the latter remains the owner of their labour power, which is reflected among other things in the possibility of its withdrawal, for example by a strike, or changes in the workplace. The relationship between the worker and the owner of the working conditions resembles, in my view, the relationship between the owner of the land and the farmer leasing it from the owner who uses the land under cultivation. In addition, the term "lease" rather than "rent" or "hire" should be used in that context for important theoretical reasons; the latter concepts refer, in our view, to personal property, e.g. renting a house from someone for her/his own use, as opposed to its use in the character of business premises.

## **8. AROUND THE CONCEPT OF PRECARIAT**

Wright is but one theorist using the term: the precariat, whose popularity calls for a commentary elucidating its status within class theory, as conceived in this paper.

To that end, the framework developed by Savage et al. (2013) on the basis of a large, BBC-sponsored Internet survey, which has recently attracted some critical attention, will be used. The researchers concerned distinguish, inter alia, class 7, dubbed Precariat. Savage et al. estimate that it comprises 15 per cent of the population. As they would have it, "occupationally", they encompass the unemployed, van drivers, cleaners, carpenters, care workers, cashiers, postal workers, as well as shopkeepers.

Thus, the British researchers put very different categories in one bag; even abstracting from the question whether an unemployment qualifies as an occupation at par with airline pilots, journalist, carpenters and a myriad of others, their particular groups making up the purported social class include a proprietary class (shopkeepers), as well as classes standing at the opposite side of the class divide, though not all of those -contrary to Savage et al.-work in services: e.g. van drivers, as the transport employees generally, constitute a separate class, whose distinctiveness, nb., was clear both for Marx and Weber.

The transportation employees' class position shows, however, many features in common with the industrial proletariat. Members of both classes are owners of material labour power (as they are involved in material labour), and, secondly, they both possess abstract labour power, i.e. are capable of producing surplus-value. Marx elucidates this question in Grundrisse asking himself the following question:

... can a surplus value be extracted from the transport costs? Let us deduct the constant part of the capital consumed in transport, ship, vehicle etc. and everything which falls under the heading of their application, since this element contributes nothing to the question, and it is irrelevant whether this is posited as = 0 or = x. Is it possible, then, that there is surplus labour in these transport costs, and that capital can therefore squeeze a surplus value out of them?

The question is simple to answer if we ask a further question, where and which is the necessary labour or the value in which it objectifies itself? The product must pay (1) its own exchange value, the labour objectified in itself; (2) the surplus time, which the shipper, carter etc. employs on its transportation. Whether he can or cannot extract the surplus value depends on the wealth of the country into which he brings the product and on its needs etc., on the use

value of the product for this land. In direct production, it is clear that all the surplus labour which the manufacturer makes the worker do is surplus value for him, in that it is labour objectified in new use values, which costs him nothing. But he can obviously not employ him during transport for a longer time than is required for the transporting. Otherwise he would throw labour time away instead of realizing it, i.e. he would not objectify it in a use value. If the sailor, the carter etc. require only half a year of labour time to live a full year (if this is generally the proportion of labour necessary for subsistence), then the capitalist employs him for a whole year and pays him a half. By adding a whole years labour time to the value of the transported products, but paying only  $\frac{1}{2}$ , he gains a surplus value of 100% on necessary labour. The case is entirely the same as indirect production, and the original surplus value of the transported product can come about only because the workers are not paid for a part of the transportation time, because it is surplus time, time over and above the labour necessary for them to live. That an individual product might be made so much more expensive, owing to the transport costs, that it could not be sold—on account of the disproportion between the value of the product and its surplus value as a transported product, a quality which becomes extinguished in it as soon as it has arrived at its destination—does not affect the matter. (Marx ([1859] 1973).

It is thus only transport of persons, not goods, that constitutes a service. As do some other examples mentioned by the authors as constitutive of Class 7, such as care work—as opposed to the sort of work the cashiers are engaged in, for instance. The latter is employed in the sphere of circulation, or commodity-money exchange. As such, this kind of labour does not add new value, does not act on the use-value of a given good, which-socio-economically-entails that its bearers possess

## **9. JOB OWNERSHIP**

It is also the concept of labour-power ownership that allows one to pinpoint a characteristic feature of this so-called precariat. The purported class distinctiveness of the latter is usually being related to a marked increase in the degree of uncertainty in labour markets. This kind of phenomena express one's difficulty in realising the value of one's labour power; if one is being employed at a series of part-time jobs -as distinct from a fixed term contract then one sure enough will be underpaid relative to the value of one's labour power. By default, too, such employees are excluded from another important ownership relationship in which a portion of their more fortunate fellow employees are engaged -flexibility, precariousness (dispossession of employee ownership of jobs), and the diffusion of part-time amount to a forced sharing of work at the societal level and at the same time a compulsion for its extension and intensification.

Thus, a growth rate of part-time and temporary (in our terms: para-) work which is "higher than the growth rate in employment implies, *ceteris paribus*, a reduction in the average waged working time. This, however, is not true if the amount earned by part time and temporary workers is less than the value of labour power, i.e. insufficient to make ends meet. Hence, precariousness compels part-time and temporary workers to have multiple jobs, the upshot being an increase in average working time and a corresponding reduction in the average wage rate the ownership of jobs on the part of employees (to which, though not

exactly in those terms, Weber referred in his opus magnum), shows up in such phenomena as guarantees of employment, conditions of lay-offs (severance, or outplacement, etc).

How important not only in practical (for the persons involved and the policy-makers) but also in theoretical terms is the category of ownership of labour power and its corollary in the form of the above-mentioned notion of ownership of jobs is shown, amongst others, by some claims put forward by Ulrich Beck believing that it is the notion of risk that is constitutive of modern society. According to that perspective, an increase in the diverse forms of flexible working has modified the very concept of occupational career, as the degree of risk involved in acquiring and maintaining employment has intensified. In modern society, employees are required to be adaptable and receptive to change in a fluctuating labour-power market.

In support of the risk society perspective, flexibilization has eaten away at standardized full-time contracts and facilitated the diversification of employment practices. In Britain, over six million people are currently employed on a part-time basis, with self-employment becoming an entrenched trend.

Although predominantly located within manual and service industries, 'self-employment' has also seeped into the professions, with employment agencies supplying lecturers, accountants, and computer analysts on demand. Again, at a surface level we can agree with Beck's line of reasoning. It is probable that employment risks are impacting upon a wider section of society than in previous eras. However, from this axiom, Beck superinduces that risk and insecurity are becoming universal features of employment. It is at this deeper structural level that the risk society thesis comes unstuck. (Mythen 2005)

According to Beck, the overarching purpose of the Fordist system was to eliminate scarcity by producing sufficient goods to meet the collective needs of society. Hence, the central dynamic (or logic) of the Fordist regime revolved around the concept of class. Beck argues that the distributional patterns of the class society were noticeably interrupted in the 1970s, when the distribution of social goods became augmented by a cachet of "social bads," such as endemic unemployment, mass pollution and nuclear hazards. Underlying the division between "goods" and "bads" is a rudimentary distinction between social priorities under the two modes of organisation: class societies are bound up with issues of scarcity, risk societies are preoccupied with the problem of insecurity (Beck 1992, 49).

In the risk society perspective, labour market insecurity epitomises a new type of risks which disrupt established social structures and cultural practices. The most apparent manifestation of employment risk is the social diversification of joblessness. With the emergence of cyclical global recessions, unemployment and job insecurity no longer plague just the poorest and least qualified: "you can run into anyone down at the unemployment office" (Beck 1998, 55). More than that, managerial elites well-schooled in dispensing with labour, themselves become dispensable. In this way, the sectoral effects of the class society are juxtaposed with the universalising effects of the risk society: "poverty is hierarchic, smog is democratic" (Beck 1992, 36). Owing to the purported diffusion of unemployment across traditional class lines, combined with the flexibilization and casualization of labour the traditional logic of the wealth distributing society is being superseded by an emerging logic of risk. In the risk society, new inequalities and alliances emerge while class positions come to be replaced by "risk positions." What Beck considers as a marked rise in cross-class unemployment, prompts his dysutopian vision of "capitalism without work" as the destiny of today's "postindustrial societies: "Insecurity on the labour market has long since spread



beyond the lower classes" (which from our standpoint is an imprecise, expressing the logic of stratification term). "It has become the mark of our times. The old 'lifetime profession' is threatened with extinction. [...] with it an entire value system, a society based on gainful employment, will disappear." (Beck 1998, 55)

From the viewpoint of this author's analytic framework, termed socio-economic structuralism, the key weakness of Beck's argument lies in its lack of the category of ownership of labour power. From this perspective, it is clear that the phenomena depicted by Beck refer to various degrees of expropriation from that ownership, its extreme form being an employee's long-term unemployment leading to deskilling and eventually to elimination from the labour-power market. Similar considerations apply to Manuel Castells' approach which addresses the issue under consideration and would greatly benefit from the notion of ownership of labour power. Castells' labour is divided into networked labour, which serves the goals of the network, and switched-off labour, which has nothing to offer the network and in the context of the network economy is non-labour (Castells 2000: 12). In our terms, short-term contracts, casual labour practices and other processes considered under the rubric named "individualisation" express depriving a given worker of his or her property in the form of either his/her labour power or job. Even granted the wide incidence of such practices, Beck's far-fetched conclusion about his "risk society" as replacing "class society" is untenable, though. in a nutshell, the crux of the matter boils down to the question whether there has been a discernible shift from a sectoral logic of class to a universal logic of risk.

Unless one is prone to abstract philosophical or even metaphysical deliberations or in other way dissociates oneself from reality, the latter speaks for itself -the logic of class demonstrates remarkable continuity (Goldthorpe and McKnight 2003). Interestingly enough, Beck is far from being unaware of the resilience of economic inequalities (1992, 35), and in spite of this he holds his ground that risk positions are steadily supplanting class positions as principal markers of identity and experience. Lest there be no misunderstanding, one should keep separate two aspects of the matter. It cannot be ruled out then that social classes lost some of their previous relevance as subjective groups of reference. Yet class identity is one issue, and class location determined by the relation to the ownership of means of economic action and labour power is quite another; its impact on not only economic but also extra-economic aspects of life of a given individual is beyond question-the following are just two items from what constitutes a long list of studies documenting the social potency of class (Nolan and Whelan 1999; xxx, 2011b).

Since the diffusion of employment risk is strikingly uneven, labour market insecurity is universal in a strictly hypothetical sense. Regarding some of Beck's specific claims, the ball is in his court to demonstrate empirically how many CEOs do actually frequent unemployment offices; in point of fact, of course, the class composition of those who are routinely dependent on social security is no secret, and it is at all honesty discreditable for a sociologist to preach the ascendancy of "the risk society", disregarding the scientific evidence to the contrary. if one does not want to conduct research of one's own, there are numerous studies that show that vulnerability to unemployment depends on one's class position in a big way (see Goldthorpe 2002). Again, one should not commit the *pars pro toto* fallacy and confound the issue of risk perception with that of risk real impact. While, to list a couple of usual culprits, globalisation, recession, offshoring, automation, etc. sure enough contribute to a widespread sense of job insecurity, particular social classes and estates<sup>1</sup> bear the real-world

consequences of those processes in nothing but equal measure. Indeed, the socio-economic divide is expanding, rather than contracting in virtually all advanced capitalist societies.

In a word, there is Strong disconfirming evidence of the emergence of a “universalising logic of risk”.

From a theoretical point of view, the distinction between class and risk positions is anything but clear-cut.

Thus, to refer back to Beck's aphoristic summary of the thrust of his theory, it is manifestly unfounded; poverty, unemployment, ecological and every other kind of risk are not egalitarian, but class-conditioned.

Moreover, Beck's claim that long-term stable employment is a relic of the past is not born out by empirical research as well. To exemplify, , Doogan (2001) on the basis of EUROSTAT data demonstrates that average job tenure in Britain remained relatively constant between 1992 and 1999, with long-term employment showing a significant increase from 7.4 million in 1992, to 9 million in 1999. Thus, the British case shows that the general trend toward downsizing (taking place in the 1990s) can co-exist with an extension of long-term employment. Similarly, Mc Govern et al.(2007:50-51) report that " the proportion of full-time, permanent jobs held by males fell between 1986 and 1994 (by 6 points), as Grimshaw and Rubery reported in their account of the ‘well-known shift’ to flexible employment. It has, however, remained quite stable for the period between 1994 and 2004. Meanwhile, the proportion of such jobs held by women has increased, though somewhat modestly. Or, to put it another way, the proportion of all "flexible' jobs has not changed dramatically since the mid-1990s.

Bringing these points together, "we must reject the notion of an ever increasing trend or shift to non-standard forms of employment (e.g. Beck 1992; Gorz 1999). The ‘well-known shift’ that was evident in the earlier period may have been simply a response to the recession of the early 1990s and could yet be reversed by the sustained period of economic prosperity that has followed" (McGovern et al. 2007).

Given both the popularity of the notion of precariat and its ideological salience, it is useful to dwell on it a bit.

The view contested above underlies a myth according to which changes in capitalism have made workers virtually powerless-permanent jobs are in principle a thing of the past and that everyone now faces a world of constant turbulence, flux and evanescence, a heraklitean world whose sole fixed attribute is its changeability, which translates into transient work and rootless employment conditions. This has clear implications for the class balance of power; the mass insecurity of the labour force has shifted the latter towards the employers.

One of the most prominent exponents of such views is Guy Standing (2011, who argues the case for the presence of a global Precariat – an emerging class comprising the rapidly growing number of people facing lives of insecurity, moving in and out of menial jobs that give little meaning to their lives. The only option in the face of those technologically determined necessities is an attempt to adjust to them by reconstructing the concept of work in the 21st Century.

As suggested above, however, this kind of views have not gone unchallenged. The most compelling counterevidence has been provided by Kevin Doogan (2009). He most emphatically disagrees with all the theories of increasing precariousness in employment. We are bombarded on a daily basis with the ever increasing mountain of news about offshoring, outsourcing, job migration to China and India, the upshot being the doctrine of job for life is

most definitely a thing of the past. Doogan's response is that the resulting precariousness cannot be regarded as a natural consequence of a fast changing global economy, but a manufactured set of insecurities engendered by neoliberal policies entailing marketisation, commercialisation and commodification.

Doogan rejects the very idea of “societal shifts based on a more tenuous connection between employers and workers”(2009:3) on the basis that “it privileges discontinuity and it ‘overdetermines’ the role of technological change. In stressing the significance of global flows of finance, and the integration of capital beyond the national economy, it greatly exaggerates the mobility propensity of non-finance capital and neglects the continuing significance of the role of the state in the workings of the market economy” (2009: 6).

Doogan points to, inter alia, "the labour force survey data from North America and Europe [...which] shows that job stability has not declined and that long-term employment has increased in many sectors of the advanced economies” (2009: 4).

The figures speak for themselves: “over both shorter and longer time frames, the growth of the long-term workforce has been significant in Europe and North America.

This is all the more remarkable as it has occurred during a period of substantial employment expansion” (Doogan 2009: 177), as one would expect expanding employment, and lots of new starters, to drive down the length of time people stay in jobs. But this simply has not happened. There is no denying that in some sectors, notably manufacturing, one can encounter some examples of corporate relocation, outsourcing and downsizing, but such practices are virtually unknown in retail or health and education—which are the areas of the greatest growth in employment. Doogan rightly argues, too, that the claim that companies have abandoned all domestic attachments and move around the world at will. is implausible. “The domestic economy provides the key market and base of operations” (2009: 72) even for many top multinationals.

In fact, the annual surveys of multinationals conducted by United Nations agencies shows that the top 100 non-financial corporations have a transnationality index of approximately 50 percent. This means that their sales, employment and value added in the home economy are as important as their combined operations in overseas markets.

Data gathered by the Bureau of Economic Analysis on US multinational firms show that investment and employment in the domestic economy have kept pace with expansion overseas. It turns out that three decades of corporate globalisation have left little impression on the balance between the domestic and foreign activities of US multinational corporations. Furthermore, Doogan notes that analysis of global foreign direct investment patterns also reveals two interesting and counter\_intuitive trends. In the first instance FDI [foreign direct investment] expands during boom periods and contracts during recessions. Thus, to blame job losses on capital migration is highly questionable.

“Secondly the lion’s share of overseas investment goes to the rich rather than poor countries. Between 1980 and 2006 the developed economies’ share of global FDI inward stock has grown from 56 percent to 70 percent, consolidating their position as the prime target for overseas investment. In other words, capital moves abroad primarily to access rich markets rather than exploit cheap labour. This shows that fears of exporting jobs are misplaced, misunderstanding-as they do-the aforementioned corporate tactics; "Research in America, where fears of overseas job loss have a much higher profile than in Europe, shows that companies use the threat of corporate relocation in order to maintain the compliance of trade unions during contract negotiations”.

To be sure, Doogan's analysis is hardly a pioneering one (which does not detract from its value); suffice it to point to a study that found that "Many of the commonly held assumptions about today's world of work need to be seriously questioned. A wide gulf exists between the over-familiar rhetoric and hyperbole we hear daily about our flexible and dynamic labour market and the realities of workplace life. The evidence simply does not sustain the view that we are witnessing the emergence of a 'new' kind of employment relations, seen in the 'end of the career' and the 'death of the permanent job for life'" (Taylor).

The fact is, the same class rationality that is supposed to push for flexibility, accounts for the reverse trend; "despite all the rhetoric of foreign competition and threats to relocate and outsource, employers generally prioritise the recruitment and retention of labour. Otherwise it would be difficult to explain the international evidence of job stability and rising long-term employment" (Doogan 2009: 206). On the other hand, one should not overstate the case against the received wisdom and deny that there are the some areas where the number of workers on non-permanent contracts of employment is genuinely high. This reality was already clear in a European-wide study from 1998 which showed that in countries such as Spain (40 percent non-permanent), France (22 percent non-permanent) and Greece (18 percent non-permanent) the scale of non-permanent employment was at a level which would penetrate deeply into workers' consciousness. It follows that there is a need for a class breakdown of the term "non-permanent", as it can cover a wide diversity of situations: it is safe to presume that, e.g., the consultant on 1,000 euros a day will not despair if his contract means only six months work. Such cases, however, should not be over-generalised; studies by the Institute of Manpower Studies in the 1990s demonstrated the insecurity and inequality of the "new economy" of flexible labour markets, outsourcing, contract working and self-employment. Self-employment, the British institute in question found, was characterised by extremes of high and low pay, with the better-off over-represented in banking, finance and business, and the poorest in personal and domestic services such as hairdressing and cleaning.

It was not only exacerbating wider social inequality, according to the institute; the economic penalties it carried persisted into old age. And for many "flexibly employed" people, the new economy was not an invigorating world of economic freedom and dynamism - the picture neo-liberal and other champions of capitalism like to portray. At the bottom end of the market, in particular, it was a universe of constraint and financial penalty (Nicholson 2003). In turn, a study of the Italian labour power market found that "while full-time permanent employees account for almost 51 percent of the Italian labour force and 'standard' workers for 72 percent" (European Foundation 2008), atypical employees represent between 8.1 percent and 20.5 percent of the Italian labour force, depending on the particular definition. Non-standard employment contracts are more likely among young people, women, and those living in southern regions of Italy.

Secondly, it is evident that the economic crisis has intensified some alarming trends such as the rise in the number of workers who are part time simply because they cannot get a full-time job, as, inter alia, the number of under-employed Americans shows.

It follows that Doogan's debunking of some myths around the present-day job market is highly useful, yet one should keep the pendulum from swinging too far in the other direction.

To revert to the sociologist who sort of prompted the above discussion, One may wonder how such critically acclaimed scholar could commit such empirical blunders. An answer can be found, we surmise, at a deeper epistemic level; the risk theory stems from the

same intellectual roots as, for example, Parsons' general value system theory or Lukacs' notion of alienation or reification as an overriding principle of capitalist society. Suffice it to point out that reification is conceived of as a universal, affecting all of society equally. All these conceptions conceive of the relationship to society of their selected idea just as Hegel conceptualised his "spirits." Well, the term itself may be outdated, but this by no means applies to the underlying notion. All the essentialist conceptions, establishing one all-pervasive principle permeating the entire social world bear thus strong resemblance to Hegelian explanations. Hegel's philosophy of history is termed objective idealism, belonging to one family with, for example, Platonism; and Plato's cave is not necessarily the best vantage point from which to observe and describe external reality. From this standpoint, the above-mentioned errors are not accidental, which of course constitutes no justification.

## **10. SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS AND STRATIFICATION/CLASS DISTINCTION**

Regarding the definition of "socio-economic status"-commonly used in the stratification literature, Bollen, Glanville, and Stecklov (2001: 157) noted, "(SES) refers to the position of individuals, families, households, or other aggregates on one or more dimensions of stratification. These dimensions include income, education, prestige, wealth, or other aspects of standing that members of society deem salient". Put another way, there are, broadly speaking, two basic types of stratification systems: unidimensional and multidimensional ones. In the former case there is only one criterion of distinguishing particular social strata, be it prestige, access to power, income, education level, occupation, etc. (cf. Farkas 2003), whereas the latter structure is based on a mixture of criteria, such as in the following study of outdoor recreation whose multiple hierarchy stratification perspective socio-conceives of the said socio-economic status (SES), in terms such as the level of education, level of income and occupational status (Bultina, Field 2001) or, in the case of Gilbert (2011) of no less than ten discrete variables.

While it is of course not the case that class theories are automatically protected against that danger, unidimensional scales are sort of by definition marked by arbitrariness; a given income scale, for example, can be partitioned in a plethora of ways and it is difficult, if not impossible, to give good, theoretically informed reasons for a particular shape of the division. Therefore, multidimensional scales are not able to eliminate the aforementioned defect; in their case, simply stated-this defect only gets multiplied and the picture becomes more clouded owing to the presence of many diverse criteria, still lacking theoretical grounding.

The flaw of excess latitude pertains also to the most famous, structural-functional theory of social stratification that posits that "social inequality among different strata in the amounts of scarce and desired goods, and the amounts of prestige and esteem which they receive, is both positively functional and inevitable in any society" (cf. Tumin 1953).

How many social strata there are? This question is essentially impossible to answer on the basis of Davis and Moore's framework. What is more, even if it was possible, one could not indicate why there should be this particular number.

The same deficiency is shared by George C. Homans's approach to stratification, according to which "status in society as a whole, like in small groups is earned or recognised by what people give and get in social exchange (...) the phenomena of stratification in small

groups are so similar to this how these phenomena look like in global societies, that in both cases they must have been generated by the same processes” (Homans, 1974: 307-8).

The consequence of this theory of social stratification, and at the same time proof of its subjectivist nature is an inability of an identification of particular strata, or, how Homans himself calls them, ‘classes’. The author of „Behaviour as Social Exchange”

Autor of „Social Behavior” uses, in order to outline the character of social divisions as viewed by his theory, the telling metaphor of the spectre of colours within which higher bands such as purple – then the next one, a little lower, e.g. the red one, etc. Could be discerned, but in which the interstice between the colours would be continual, and any other, but only an arbitrary line of partition could determine, where crimson has ended, and where redness has begun” (Homans, 1974: 309).

In another, this time not based on metaphors, statement Homans maintains that from the standpoint of his conception „attribution of individuals to particular classes cannot be nothing else as an arbitrary thing; it would be perfectly right to call a member of the upper class a member of the middle class” (Homans, 1974: 310).

To bring out another significant dimension of distinction between class and stratification systems, these differ along both the social space and time dimensions. In the latter case, stratification is held to be a universal feature of all human societies, whereas classes are said to be present in only some types of historically existing societies. Regarding that suprahistorical attribute, in a typical formulation, “ societies [...] always possess some kind of status system which, by its own values, places people in higher or lower positions”(Warner, Meeker, Eels 1960).

The following definition both confounds strata with classes and equally mistakenly describes the latter as universal: “Social class refers to the hierarchical distinctions between individuals or groups in societies or cultures. Anthropologists, historians, and sociologists identify class as universal, although what determines class will vary widely from one society to another” (New World Encyclopaedia 2011).

From the aforementioned fundamental premise it is concluded that in modern Western nations, stratification is broadly organised into three main layers: upper class, middle class, and lower class. Each class may be further subdivided into smaller categories (e.g. occupational). This approach closely follows that of W. Lloyd Warner, who made his name by the well-known definition of three social classes: upper, middle, and lower, with each level further divided into upper and lower. In another version “Each class level is divided into three grades, the top one designating those individuals whose position within the class level is strong or high (symbol ++), the middle one including individuals whose position is ordinary or ‘solid’ (symbol +), and the bottom one for those individuals whose class position is weak (symbol —)” (Warner, Meeker, Eels 1960).

This basic model has been expanded and modified by other theorists. For instance, according to historian Paul Fussell the U.S. society constitutes a nine-tier hierarchy. Fussell’s model classifies Americans according to the following classes:

Top out-of-sight: the super-rich, heirs to huge fortunes

Upper Class: rich CEOs, diplomats, people who can afford full-time domestic staff, and some high salaried, prominent professionals (examples include surgeons and some highly-paid types of lawyers)

Upper-Middle Class: self-made, well-educated professionals

Middle Class: office workers

High Prole: skilled blue-collar workers

Mid Prole: workers in factories and the service industry

Low Prole: manual laborers

Destitute: the homeless and the disreputable (but still free)

Bottom out-of-sight: those incarcerated in prisons and institutions (Fussell 1993).

The above model alludes to certain proprietary and class criteria, yet in a haphazard and tacit manner which does not contribute to its conceptual consistency. In the absence of ownership, particular categories are bound to be introduced on an ad hoc basis.

"These categories are particular to state-based societies as distinct from, for instance, feudal societies composed mainly of nobility and peasantry. Stratification may also be defined by kinship ties or caste" (Saunders 1990).

This view contains a frequently committed mistake according to which social stratification is a general concept, of which class and caste or estate are subtypes. Meanwhile, it is inconsistent with the position espoused here, by virtue of which all these four concepts refer to distinct social categories, which may be at most subsumed within the category of social differentiation that, from our standpoint, is broader than those of social stratification, as well as class or estate.

A further distinguishing feature of social strata is that it is possible to discern such groups throughout the entire society. A case in point is Warner and his collaborators' statement to the effect that "Those who occupy co-ordinating positions acquire power and prestige. They do so because their actions partly control the behavior of the individuals who look to them for direction. Within this simple control there is simple power. Those who exercise such power either acquire prestige directly from it or have gained prestige from other sources sufficient to be raised to a co-ordinating position. For example, among many primitive peoples a simple fishing expedition may be organised so that the men who fish and handle each boat are under the direction of one leader. The efforts of each boat are directed by the leader and, in turn, each boat is integrated into the total enterprise by its leader's taking orders from his superior. The same situation prevails in a modern factory. Small plants with a small working force and simple problems possess a limited hierarchy, perhaps no more than an owner who bosses all the workers. But a large industrial enterprise, with complex activities and problems, like General Motors, needs an elaborate hierarchy of supervision. The position in a great industrial empire which integrates and co-ordinates all the positions beneath it throughout all the supervising levels down to the workers has great power and prestige. The same holds true for political, religious, educational, and other social institutions; the more complex the group and the more diverse the functions and activities, the more elaborate its status system is likely to be" (Warner, Meeker, Eels 1960:9). The authors believe it is possible to speak of "the stratification of employees, of children on school records, of names on a customer list, or of subscribers to a newspaper or magazine" (Warner, Meeker, Eels 1960: 9).

As noted above, social stratification can be discerned in each and every walk of life, sports included, as an article on "Baseball's middle class" testifies; its author's reasoning clearly resembles the notion of median typical of the mainstream middle-class approach: "An

usually high number of teams are hovering around the .500 mark. [...]. The Washington Nationals are at the top of the middle class" (BERNHARDT 2014).

Radical as it may seem, the above case is small potatoes compared to the subsequent example, concerning a study conducted at the Mpala Research Center, Kenya that "is home to more than 20 large mammal species, which can be divided, *inter alia*, along the key lines of social class-the reader is told-whereby "individuals can be subdivided into three distinct social classes: territorial males (T), bachelor males (B), and nursery herd members (N)" (Estes, 1974).

These classes denote age, sex, and behavior, but also reflect intraspecific gradations in territoriality, for example, territorial males defend patches of habitat against other males. This is not to deny, sure enough, sometimes elaborate social organisation that can be observed in many animal species, but the crucial question is: what cognitive advantages, as opposed to confusion, are to be derived from the terminology common to the zoologist, Marx and Weber? The question imposes itself all the more forcefully that one of the articles invoked above as a source of this peculiar approach bears the title "Stratum identification..." [emphasis-the present author], which in its own way illustrates the purported affinity of both approaches concerned that in the present study is called into question, or more precisely, reduced to the domain of language illegitimately appropriated by stratification approaches.

To revert, for a change, to human populations, Bollen et al. (2001) as if referring to the general defect of stratification mentioned above, identified a number of problems arising from the measurement of SES across a wide range of studies. These problems included a lack of consensus in terms of the conceptualisation of SES, a lack of clarity as to the underlying structure and dimensionality of SES, and the fact that various measures of SES have been used interchangeably across studies.

The result of this ambiguity is that variations in SES have been measured in a large number of ways, including educational achievement, occupational standing, social class, socioeconomic status, income, exposure to poverty, and exposure to adverse life events such as unemployment or single parenthood (Bollen et al., 2001; Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). In the same vein, exposure to social inequality has been assessed using individual level, household level, and community level measures (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002).

The result of these strategies is that the literature on social inequality and other outcomes has been based on a wide spectrum of measures that have been collected in different ways and for different purposes, but which have been used more or less interchangeably to describe social and economic stratification and its effects on life course outcomes" (Fergusson et al. 2008).

The aforementioned candid confession on the part of a proponent of a given research strand cogently shows how flawed methodologically and conceptually it is; after all, to include social class in stratification research is to blur the distinction between the latter and the alternative approach to social differentiation. On the other hand, the above SES' description reveals its circular character. Small wonder, therefore, that "SES was dismissed because by 1970 it had become a buzzword. Among its various meanings, as an index of household consumption it is really a measure of wealth. In another definition of SES, consistent with an early SES index developed by Sewell (1940), it encompasses "material possessions, cultural possessions, and social participation" (Haller & Saraiva, 1973: 2, 8).



This definition of SES works as a summary of all three content dimensions of status, “accounting for practically all the common variance of indicators of wealth, prestige and power” (Haller, 1970:471). Thus, SES is not an additional content variable.

By no means all accounts that grasp the essential quality of stratification noted above, do by the same token view correctly its relation to class theory.

The Distributional Theory, or the gradation concept of class[...] is descriptive, as opposed to analytic[...] This descriptive theory succeeds in illustrating the inequality, hierarchy, and stratification of a society, but does not properly define social class. It obscures the true social classes amongst many superfluous stratas by ignoring the difference between the business and corporation owners versus the workers. [...] the Distributional Theory continues to conceal the real social classes behind the ambiguous and constantly influx-defining indicator, income.

Contrastingly, the Relational Theory of Social Class focuses primarily on the productive system of the society when defining social class. In this theory, two social classes exist: those who own the prevailing productive apparatus and those who do not [...] two classes defined in a dialectical opposition to each other is the starting point for Marx’s theory of social change. Theorists also express this class dichotomy as the superordinate class versus the subordinate class, the owners versus the producers, or the owners of capital versus the wage laborers.

[...] According to the Relational Theory, the term middle class, arising from the days of feudalism, incorporates only a minuscule group of small business owners squeezed in the middle of the owners of the prevailing productive apparatus and the wage laborers [...] Similar to the Distributional Theory, the Relational Theory acknowledges stratification and inequality. It does not, however, define class in these terms. The Relational Theory views inequality as “one symptom of a more total and through-going relation of exploitation between the two parties at the point of production” (Jones 2006).

This emphasis on a dynamic character of class theory is sure enough sound, reflecting- as it does-the aforementioned more complex nature of class relations compared to statistical relations linking income or other strata.

The dialectical in that sense class theory is diametrically opposed to the anti-dialectical, or metaphysical character of “general theory of social stratification, where social structures are generally understood as stable, and stratification regimes have in-built sustaining properties, as well as powerful defenders” (Erikson & Jonsson, 1996: 67). Well, a good measure of the difference concerned is the fact that in the universe of social stratification there is no counterpart to class struggle; “strata struggle” is but a bizarre neologism.

Whilst the critique by Jones of stratification theory is sound (it, by the way, is in keeping with our earlier observations), his account of class theory is over-simplified. As will be argued extensively below, the theory cannot be reduced to any two-class model, even with some residuum in the middle. Jones fails to see that viewing class theory that way he likens it to stratification theory with its hierarchy of categories and honestly it is the latter that might justifiably claim the title of a more adequate , because offering a larger number of analytic categories, depiction of societal differentiation.

The insistence on the non-hierarchical character of class theories cannot be over-emphasised since even authors of many books on class theory are apparently not aware of it, as an example of Erik Olin Wright shows. He reckons, namely, that “the diverse definitions of class can be analysed in terms of three nested theoretical dimensions:

- (1) Whether class is fundamentally understood in gradational or in relational terms;

(2) if class is understood in relational terms, whether the pivotal aspect of class relations is seen as located in the market or in production;

(3) if class relations are primarily located within production, whether production is analysed above all in terms of the technical division of labor, authority relations, or exploitation. These three theoretical dimensions generate five basic types of definitions of class" (1979).

Wright's approach to an issue of economic foundations of class relations is in fact a reductionist one, as the former by no means cannot be brought down to the three factors mentioned by him (at least two of which are clearly hierarchical in nature).

Wright asks "what it is about the organisation of production that forms the basis for the determination of class", and replies that "Three different ways of understanding the structure of production relations have dominated the analysis of classes within production: production is defined primarily as a system of technical divisions of labor: production is analysed above all as a system of authority relations: and, production, insofar as it determines classes, is seen fundamentally as a system of exploitation" (1979), yet in his answer, strangely enough, the notion of property (not to be conflated with exploitation) is missing and, additionally, the real-world classes are situated not only within the system of production but also within other economic substructures: neither commerce, nor finance, services or transport cannot be called production without over-stretching the meaning of the latter term.

## **11. EXPLOITATION AND CLASS STRUCTURE**

As it is connected to the paramount set of common stereotypes and misconceptions concerning in particular one specific strand of class theory, it is useful to clear up those misunderstandings.

E. O. Wright reckons that "The hallmark of Marxist discussions of class is the emphasis on the concept of exploitation"(1979:14), or, in a different wording, in "an approach to class analysis within the Marxist tradition [...] the central idea is defining the concept of class in terms of processes of exploitation" (Wright 2005: 6), which idea, in a slightly modified shape, is also reiterated in another context: "the ingredient that most sharply distinguishes the Marxist conceptualization of class from other traditions is the concept of exploitation" (Wright 2005: 5).

The most likely source of the above common view, ascribing to Marxism an exploitation-based bipolar view of antagonistic classes is the most widely known work of Marx and Engels, i.e. "The Communist Manifesto", whose one of the most famous sentences reads: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. [...] 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" (Marx and Engels 1848).

While it should be emphasised that even the famous paragraph in question involves a more complex view of the societal class structure than is commonly thought, let us, for the sake of simplification, accept that this commonly held view referred to above contains a grain of truth. Such an interpretation, however, abstracts from the primarily political and

ideological, as distinct from scientific, nature of the document under consideration. Even leaving this circumstance aside, though, the above-mentioned view is difficult to sustain in the face of what can be found in other works of both co-authors of "manifesto". For example, Engels postulated, as a general proposition, that "large-scale agriculture presupposes or creates a class antagonism—slave-owners and slaves, feudal lords and serfs, capitalists and wage-workers—while small-scale agriculture does not necessarily involve class differences between the individuals engaged in agricultural production, and that on the contrary the mere existence of such differences indicates the incipient dissolution of smallholding economy" (1877: Ch. I, Part II). In the case of Marx, instructive are in that regard primarily his historical writings; in „18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte” he writes, for example, about „aristocracy of finance, the industrial bourgeoisie, the middle class, the petty bourgeoisie”. Thus, according to this statement the bourgeois class should be further subdivided.

In addition, all indications are, Marx meant his two-class vision as primarily his prediction of the future of capitalist formation of society rather than an description of the present-day capitalism. Thus, Wright's above reference to "the Marxist tradition" is off the mark, to say the least; the concept of Marxist tradition from which its founder would be excluded would be a bizarre one

## **12. CLASS ACCORDING TO CLASSICS**

Nevertheless, there is no denying that Marx did not leave any systematic definition of class. The relevant, nomen omen last chapter of Capital (its third volume) (1885 is, as is well-known, similar to Schubert's famous symphony. Still, Marx's statement gives rich material for thought. Consider this:

**BLOCK QUOTE START** The owners merely of labour-power, owners of capital, and land-owners, whose respective sources of income are wages, profit and ground-rent, in other words, wage-labourers, capitalists and land-owners, constitute then three big classes of modern society based upon the capitalist mode of production. [...] The first question to be answered is this: What constitutes a class? — and the reply to this follows naturally from the reply to another question, namely: What makes wage-labourers, capitalists and landlords constitute the three great social classes?

At first glance — the identity of revenues and sources of revenue. There are three great social groups whose members, the individuals forming them, live on wages, profit and ground-rent respectively, on the realisation of their labour-power, their capital, and their landed property. However, from this standpoint, physicians and officials, e.g., would also constitute two classes, for they belong to two distinct social groups, the members of each of these groups receiving their revenue from one and the same source. The same would also be true of the infinite fragmentation of interest and rank into which the division of social labour splits labourers as well as capitalists and landlords... [Here the manuscript breaks off.] **BLOCK QUOTE END.**

Let us, however, put ourselves in Marx's shoes and attempt to answer the question which he put to himself. In our view, there can be any doubt that the classes distinguished by the author of Capital are based on economically understood property relations.

Let us test our interpretation on one of Marx's most prominent followers, who put forward a precise definition of class. We are speaking, naturally, about Vladimir Lenin according to whom

**BLOCK QUOTE START** Classes are large groups of people which differ from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated in law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organization of labour and, consequently, by the dimensions and method of acquiring the share of social wealth of which they dispose. Classes are groups of people one of which can appropriate the labour of another owing to the different places they occupy in a definite system of social economy. **BLOCK QUOTE END** (1965: 49).

Again, much like as in the case of *The Communist Manifesto*, the concrete shape of Lenin's definition was impacted by the fact that it was formulated in the midst of Russian revolution, and, consequently, the text containing it was bound to possess political rather than academic nature-the purpose of the definition concerned was to serve as an effective weapon in the class struggle rather than an argument in seminar disputes. Nevertheless, it contains many valuable ingredients. First and foremost, there can be no denying that for Lenin social classes are grounded in the relations of ownership (which, of course, hide behind otherwise rather ambiguous term: the relation to the means of production), ones not only clearly distinguished from their legal expression, but also including, which is most important, the ownership of the labour power. This clearly follows both from other, historical and socio-economic works by Lenin, but also from the context of the definition under consideration. Namely, Lenin stresses that for the total abolition of classes to happen, it does not suffice to abolish merely private property in the means of production, as he writes: It is clear that, in order to achieve the total abolition of classes, not only must the power of the landlord and the capitalist be broken, and their rights of property taken from them, but that every private interest in the means of wealth production must be destroyed. The contrast between hand and brain worker [i.e. the owners of different types of the labour power- note: the present author.] must also be ended.

Lenin's definition has more merits to it, however. The fact, for example, that he uses the term social economy is, of course, fully consistent with the approach of such classics of economic sociology as Weber. Even more noteworthy is taking account of what Lenin calls the system of social production, as it suggests that classes exist also outside the sphere of production as such, although not outside the bounds of the economy.

We do not, however, dwell on what seems more controversial in Lenin definition, do not wonder whether class exploitation has been conceived of by the author as a necessary or merely secondary and conditional element of the concept of class. This is the case, because, whatever Lenin's eventual position was, we reject any attempt at the reduction the notion of the class structure to antagonistic classes. In our view, as noted above, each class structure, including that of capitalism, includes classes whose status cannot be couched in these polar terms.

Considering what has been established so far, we may define classes as groups of people which differ from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of economic activity (i.e. their ownership of the means of production, exchange, transport, finance and services, or labour power).

As mentioned above, the theoretical differences between the two founding fathers of class theory are more often than not being overdrawn. Meanwhile, in point of fact there are far-reaching similarities between the Marxian and Weberian approaches.

Consider What is an initial concept in the entire conceptual chain: “class status” which applies to the typical probability that

- (a) given state of provision with goods,
- (b) external conditions of life, and
- (c) subjective satisfaction or frustration will be possessed by an individual or a group.

These probabilities define class status in so far as they are dependent on the kind and extent of control or lack of it which the individual has over goods or services and existing possibilities of their exploitation for the attainment of income or receipts within a given economic order. (Weber 1947)

Thus, note that even as a point of departure, Weber refers to ownership of labour power and the means of production (as an ultimate source of goods mentioned in the definition). Small wonder that an implicit or explicit reference to property relations is found in the remaining definitions introduced by him. Thus, for Weber, a “class” is any group of persons occupying the same class status. He goes on to say that the following types of classes may be distinguished:

- a) a class is a “property class” when class status for its members is primarily determined by the differentiation of property holdings;
- b) a class is an 'acquisition class' when the class situation of its members is primarily determined by their opportunity for the exploitation of services on the market. (Weber 1947)

In order to demonstrate to what extent his theory relies on ownership relations, Weber even declares, in nonequivocal terms, that: “The possession of property defines the main class difference.” According to Weber:

The owners of property have a definite advantage, and in some cases a monopoly on, action in the market of commodities and, especially, labor. They have privileged access to the sources of wealth creation, by virtue of ownership and control of the markets. Weber identified a subdivision among property owners based on the means of their wealth creation. Entrepreneurs use wealth in commercial ventures. Rentiers profit by interest on their property, through investments or rent of land. Both forms of ownership yield advantages resulting from the ability to convert property to money. The property class is defined by the kinds of services individual workers provide in the labor market. (Shortell 2002).

It should be noted that E.O. Wright utterly overlooks this dimension crucial to the Weberian framework in his comparison of the commonalities and differences between the latter and a Marxian approach, (2005:28) whereas from our perspective the crucial common feature of both theories is that it is economic property relations that underlie the class relations. Absent the former, any claims such as put forth by Wright: "Thus, for example, if one wants to explain how class location affects standards of living of people, there is no particular reason for the concept of class location used in the analysis to differ within a Marxist or a Weberian approach" (2005:28) hang in the air.

This should not come as a surprise, given the reader's impression that Wright has difficulty grasping the substance of Weberian approach, which he defines, after Tilly, as "opportunity hoarding"—a concept closely associated with the work of Max Weber" (2009: 108), whose definition mixes up the notion of estate with that of class- framed in line more with some interpretations of Weber than the original theory itself: "In order for certain jobs to confer high income and special advantages, it is important for their incumbents to have various means of excluding others from access to them. This is also sometimes referred to as a process of social closure, in which access to a position becomes restricted. One way of doing this is by creating requirements that are very costly for people to fulfill. Educational credentials often have this character: high levels of schooling generate high income in part because there are significant restrictions on the supply of highly educated people" (2009: 108).

This shows clearly why Wright's identification of "The most basic anchor of Weber's own analysis of class " as "the question about broad historical variation" is inadequate, misguided even. This is not to deny, though, that Wright has a point in his critique of "many neo-Weberians, particularly those whose empirical concerns are restricted to the analysis of developed capitalist societies", for whom "the issue of broad historical variation tends to get marginalized" (2005:188). But his own proposal is far too general to provide anything like *differentia specifica* of Weberian approach. Suffice it to point out that for Marx and many other thinkers the issue was also a theoretical priority. Historicity is not so much a premise as an implication of a given approach. And what constitutes the core element of Weberian notion of class is the concept of relations referred to not only above but also below.

That the identification of the aforementioned classes is property-based is also shown by the examples indicated by Weber himself. Thus, amongst property classes there are landowners, owners of slaves, and other rentiers such as, among others, creditors, holders of securities, and at the opposite pole individuals owned by others, i.e. slaves and serfs which, in the theoretical language used by this author, translates into a lack of ownership of their own labour power. Similarly, among acquisition classes Weber distinguishes entrepreneurs including industrialists, merchants, but also labour aristocracy defined on the basis of monopolised skills, and on the bottom skilled manual semi and unskilled workers. It is evident that in the case of the latter grouping they have been stratified according to the quality of their labour power. Likewise, the term "monopolised skills" refers to nothing other than ownership of labour power.

Acquisition classes in a negatively privileged situation are workers of the various principal types. They may be roughly classified as skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled.

Negatively privileged with respect to property belong typically to one of the following types:

- a) They are themselves objects of ownership, that is they are unfree.
- b) They are 'outcasts' that is 'proletarians' in the sense meant in Antiquity.
- c) They are debtor classes-which is noteworthy, as Weber by the same token seems to acknowledge that the debtor-creditor relations are economic property relations, and thereby class relations. and,
- d) the 'poor'-this term is less clear, and should be probably treated as a heuristic category, to be deconstructed analytically.

In between stand the 'middle' classes. This term includes groups who have all sorts of property, or of marketable abilities through training, who are in a position to draw their support from these sources. Some of them may be 'acquisition' classes. Entrepreneurs are in this category by virtue of essentially positive privileges; proletarians, by virtue of negative privileges. ... (Weber 1947: 425).

In this connexion as well as the above, independent peasants and craftsmen are to be treated as belonging to the "middle classes". *Mittelklassen*« " This category often includes in addition officials, whether they are in public or private employment, the liberal professions, and workers with exceptional monopolistic assets or positions".

Clearly, there are some similarities between the above Weberian definition and at least some of more theoretically refined treatments to be found in the literature. This by itself, obviously, does not make it valid. Conversely, Weber's concept sure enough attempts to embrace too much-i.e. its components are not picked up on a unitary basis; it appears that Weber endeavoured to combine elements of two widespread in the social-scientific literature notions: the old and the new middle class. Yet this attempt has been not fortunate. What Weber strives to put in one bag are, on the one hand, akin peasant and petty-bourgeois classes. That is to say, in the latter case the traditional Marxist-but applied by non-Marxists, too-term has been used. referring to some proprietary classes, distinguished from the bourgeoisie by the fact of not taking advantage of other people's labour. In other words, the representatives of the classes concerned are not employers themselves, are, to use perhaps more conventional term, self-employed. Their double independence-in the sense of being their own employers, not depending on anybody's labour, suggests a definite terminological innovation.

This is not so much the issue of Marxist origin of the term as such, but rather a baggage of primarily negative associations both in the social sciences and humanities as in the literature, including drama. And it seems that this historically formed vast front of mighty ammunition makes its control over the public imagery very tight. To be sure, on a general plane such pejorative stereotypes have no place in science, albeit behind each social stereotype lurks always some real fact, which, however, by virtue of its exaggeration as if divorces itself from this past historical base. Besides, each social class has in its ranks its own measure of angels and devils. A word of caution- social scientists (remember philosopher-kings?) rarely have such an impact on the mass imagery so as to alter concrete images built into it, often over a long span of time. Nevertheless, a proposal may be ventured, drawn on the same Max Weber, to use with reference to the grouping concerned the phrase "autocephalous class", which captures the aforementioned essential socio-economic co-efficients of their *modus operandi*.

However, this concept may not refer to the peasantry; despite some similarities, the role of agricultural land as their property(referred to by Marx as "the living machine") sets them apart from any artisans, independent lawyers or doctors.

Finally, another concept confirming the role of property in the Weberian framework is that of "social class", which in contradistinction to the economic classes discussed above is defined as being "composed of the plurality of class statuses between which an interchange of individuals on a personal basis or in the course of generations is readily possible and typically observable" (Weber 1947). One questionable aspect of this definition is its terminology: are there any grounds to assume that only social mobility is of social character, whilst this characteristic is for some undisclosed reason not to pertain to property relations, although

their socio-economic nature can be denied only on the basis of jurisprudential approach which is, however, unacceptable within the social sciences.

Even more importantly, Weber identifies his social classes on a different basis than the ownership criteria used with reference to the property and commercial classes. This violates a principle of internal coherence and consistency as well as that of formal elegance, which both ought to characterise genuinely scientific theory. There is no denying that in the form of the concept in question Weber raised an important issue of different levels of class analysis. His own solution is, for reasons given above, unsatisfactory, though, which prompts us to put forward an alternative approach to the same question in the form of the notion of mega-classes.

The latter enables us to aggregate historically given classes in a multilevel fashion, taking account of their constitutive common feature, as in the concept of capitalist mega-class that is composed of several capitalist classes proper (industrial, financial, etc), wherein the differences between particular objects of ownership concerned distinguish one class of capital owners from another, whose private ownership of capital underlies their commonality as a mega-class. Interestingly enough, the creator of the aforementioned term does not appear to be fully satisfied with it either, as the following enumeration shows:

"Examples of 'social classes' are (a) the 'working' class as a whole. It approaches this type the more completely mechanized the productive process becomes, (b) The 'lower middle' classes. (c) The 'intelligentsia' without independent property and the persons whose social position is primarily dependent on technical training such as engineers, commercial and other officials, and civil servants These groups may differ greatly among themselves, in particular according to costs of training, (d) The classes occupying a privileged position through property and education" (Weber 1947). The inconsistency which at a deeper level turns out to be, conversely, a theoretical consistency relative to the overall Weberian position consists in the language of economic ownership, including ownership of labour power, coming to the fore in the aforementioned paragraph.

### **13. CONCLUSION**

In a way, the thrust of the present paper could be brought down to a single sentence, which would draw upon the enormous currency of the term "middle class", probably the most popular class concept as far as both the academic literature and the media are concerned-"the middle class" is a misnomer, or more precisely, an oxymoron, as its two elements come from two different universes of discourse. In other words, social strata and social classes are very different social structures that must not be conflated with each other, as is often the case in the literature.

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<sup>1</sup> The term "social estate" was used both by Marx and Weber, in whom case it is commonly mistranslated as a "status group", but within the present conceptual framework it acquires a new interpretation, relating them to the relations of non-economic ownership whose full list is presented in : (xxx, 2011). An important merit of such an approach to social differentiation is its-postulated as an ideal to be reached for the life or hard sciences-formal elegance inasmuch as both parts of the overall framework are based on an akin criterion without, though, obliterating the distinction between the economic and non-economic domain.