

Social Stratification refers to the hierarchical structure of social inequality (Jary and Jary). Social stratification is a form of social inequality. In fact Haralambos and Holborn define it as particular form of social inequality which refers to the distinction of social groups that are ranked one above the other in terms of factors such as prestige and wealth. Members of a particular stratum share the same lifestyle, a common identity and share common interests which distinguish them from the members of other strata (Haralambos and Holborn).

According to Macionis and Plummer there are four basic principles of social stratification:

- 1.** Social Stratification is present in every society (Macionis and Plummer). Some sociologists might argue that it is social inequality that is present not stratification itself since social stratification is a feature of capitalist societies.
- 2.** Social Stratification continues from one generation to the next; an understanding of social stratification should be taken from a societal not individual point of view (Macionis and Plummer).
- 3.** Social Stratification is universal but variable (while social stratification is found everywhere what is unequal and how unequal it is varies from one society to another) (Macionis and Plummer)
- 4.** Social Stratification involves beliefs as well as inequality. (Macionis and Plummer)

Stratification systems

There are three main stratification systems in the world:

- 1. Caste system:** This is an example of a rigid or closed stratification system where an individual's position and status are determined at birth (social mobility is not possible). It is traditionally associated with India where the basis of the system is determined by religion, more specifically the Hindu religion. Other examples of a caste system are the Apartheid movement in south Africa and the American South before the Civil Rights Movement.

In the Hindu caste system there are four castes or varnas, which are ranked in terms of ritual purity) and a fifth group called the untouchables. The castes are:

- **Brahmins:** This is the highest caste and consisted of the priests, and religious people who are considered to be the embodiment of purity and holiness
- **Kshatryia:** This group consists of the rulers, warriors and administrators
- **Vaisya:** This group consists of the merchants, the traders and the farmers.
- **Sudras:** These are the manual workers.
- **The Untouchables:** These are the outcastes of this system. They are considered to be the unclean and impure group who perform the unclean and degrading jobs. They tend to live on the periphery the villages and have their own communities. (Haralambos and Holborn).

2. Slavery system: This is another example of a closed stratification system. Unlike the Hindu Caste system, it was legitimized by the ideology that one groups of individuals existed to serve another group. The members of this system did not have equal rights and an individual's social position was based on race and status. The system had three strata:

- **The Upper stratum:** This stratum consisted of the white plantation owners, overseers and skilled workers. This group tended to be of the same race, colour and status within the society.

- **The Middle stratum:** This consisted of Freed slaves and free-born mulattos. Because of their lighter skin the mulattos had a higher social status.
- **The Lower stratum:** This consisted of the slaves and was further subdivided into the house slaves (who had a higher social status) and the field slaves. The field slaves were further divided into gangs .The first gang was made up of the strongest slaves, the second gang consisted of the women and younger children while the third gang consisted of the older and more delicate slaves.

3. Class system: This stratification system is more open and social mobility can in fact occur. Many scholars state that this system began during the industrial revolution and is defined by the industrial productive system. In this system people are often separated their job. Classes are ranked in hierarchical order , have conflicting interests and are often defined in relation to one another (Giddens 2001).

Social Mobility refers to the movement of individuals between different positions in the hierarchies of social stratification in a society. It may involve upward or downward mobility that is moving up or down the hierarchy or it involves mobility from one generation to the next.

- **Intergenerational mobility** refers to mobility between generations. This is measured by the achieved status of an individual when compared to his /her family of origin, even though the position of the father is most often used.
- **Intragenerational mobility** refers to mobility within a single generation. It is measured by comparing the occupational status of an individual at different points in his/her life (Giddens 2001). Mobility can only occur within an open social stratification system where the individuals achieved status takes precedence over the individual's ascribed status. Achieved status is a social position obtained through an individual's talent and ability. Ascribed status is

a social position that is fixed at birth and through life. (Barnard and Burgess)

Concepts of Stratification in a Comparative Perspective:

1. Class: Class or 'Social Class' is often referred to as the hierarchical distinction which exists between individuals or groupings within a society. Within the stratification system this position could be middle class, working class or upper class. An individual's class may be determined by his/her occupation, income or wealth (Jary and Jary).

2. Race: This term is often used to describe a group of people who share the same biological traits. (Macdonis and Plummer). Social scientists now distinguish race as 'a socially constructed characterization which specifies rules for identification of a given group' (Jary and Jary, p 504).

3. Ethnicity: Barnard and Burgess define it as: 'the properties of people who share a similar culture, particularly language, customs, religion and history, that is distinct from that of other groups in society.' (Barnard and Burgess, p 475)

4. Caste: This is form of social stratification which is based on ascribed status. The system is closed, that is, social mobility is impossible, contact between groups is restricted and economic inequalities are a reflection of non-economic criteria (Jary and Jary).

5. Gender: Gender refers to the social and socio-psychological attributes used to categorize human beings as 'masculine' and 'feminine'. These categories are culturally defined and are accompanied by culturally imposed behavioural traits which are deemed socially appropriate (Jary and Jary).

Functionalist

The functionalist theory sees social stratification as functional and necessary for the survival of the social system. The functionally more important roles should be given higher prestige and social rewards. Social inequality is not a source of conflict. The two main proponents of this theory are Davis and Moore (role allocation theory), who argue that roles within the society should be allocated so that they are performed efficiently. Thus, the greater the importance of the role the more the rewards a society will attach to it. This reward could take the form of income, prestige, power.

The society motivates its people through unequal distribution of resources because in order to obtain the rewards that a given position has an individual must aspire, work harder and longer. They point out that if the society were in fact based on egalitarian principles the social system would collapse. This is because if someone carries out a job poorly and is rewarded in the same way as the individual which performs well then there would be little incentive for anyone to make their best efforts (Macionis and Plummer). The system must therefore encourage individuals to work harder, spend the time and money to prepare themselves for the more important roles.

Marxist

According to the Marxist theory social stratification is an inevitable part of the capitalist society. The system contains two main groups of individuals whose positions are determined by their relation to the means of production. The bourgeoisie or the capitalist own the means of production, (land, capital and entrepreneurship) they use their power to create the values that are taught within society. These values are based on what is advantageous to the capitalist class. They therefore instill the proletariat a false class consciousness. This false class consciousness divides the proletariat (ensuring that they will not band together to become a threat to the bourgeoisie). This makes it easier for the capitalists to exploit the working class and make profit by keeping wages low.

The value of the work done by the proletariat is much more than the wages which they are paid, Marx called this surplus value. It is for this reason that there will be conflict within the capitalist society. For Marx as consciousness grows and the people within the class begin to realize that they have a common interest, they band together to secure those interests and build class solidarity. The class ceases to be a class in itself and becomes a class for itself. This is the case for the capitalist

class but not for the working class. When the working class /proletariats become a class for itself Marx predicts that there will be a revolution which will lead to the formation a anew communism where everyone will share equally in the profits and resources that society has to offer.(Haralambos and Holborn)

Weberian

Weber agrees with Marx that social inequality has an economic base. Within the market economy individuals have similar positions because they receive similar economic rewards , however their skills may be different. The difference in the market value of these skills attract different rewards which make it impossible for only two classes to exist within the society He ,therefore, points out that social stratification is an interaction of several distinct dimensions: class, status and power. An individual may have a high position on one dimension but a low position on the other.

For Weber class refers to a continuum upon which individuals can be ranked. It is determined by the individual's occupation, economic situation, the general state of the labour market and life chances. In Weber's context social class establishes the equality of life for the individual and group. He identified the following classes:

- The properties upper class
- The property-less white collar worker
- The petty bourgeoisie
- The manual working class

An individual's location within the stratification system determines the life chances that the individual will have which includes access and use of medical care and facilities as well as longevity and educational opportunities. Weber further acknowledged that prestige could influence the position of the individual within the stratification system. He argues that even though individuals may have the same lifestyle, earn the same income and are in the same profession the social status that is given will divide people into separate social groups. Weber states that status within the society is matter of honor, prestige and lifestyle. Therefore, while class divisions are a matter of unequal distribution of economic resources, status is a matter of unequal distribution of socially defined honor (Haralambos and Holborn).

The final determinant of an individual's position within the stratification system is power. Power is associated with the formation of groups or associations which seek to advance the interests of their association (Haralambos and Holborn).

Education, equality and social mobility

One of the main reasons for obtaining an education in the Caribbean is the prospect of a legitimized means of social mobility. Roslyn Lynch who conducted a study on The Barbadian Labour market concluded that in spite of the removal of educational and legal barriers, the Barbadian labour market is characterized by high levels of gender inequality. Women are highly concentrated in female jobs.

In fact, data from 1946 to 1980 showed that only a few women had moved into the skilled and professional categories of employment. These findings are supported by Seebaran-Suite who notes that while women have made strides in education, they are yet to do so in the labour force, where women account for only 38%. Paula Mark further adds that females tended to occupy lower levels in the occupational hierarchy in the University of the West Indies (Mark 1991).

The education system showed the inequalities that were inherent in the stratification system of Trinidad and Tobago. Ishmael Baksh (1986) in *Education, and Equality of Opportunity in Trinidad and Tobago* states that true equality does not exist in Trinidad since students of the lower classes are disproportionately assigned to junior secondary schools and are more likely to be technically oriented. These students are more likely to have lower educational and occupational goals. The illusion of equality of educational opportunity means that education functions as restricting social mobility for the lower classes (Baksh).

The patterns of stratification which existed and continues to exist in the Caribbean can be traced to the history of the region. Groups who are similar with respect to ethnicity, race, education and status are more likely to intermarry and associate with themselves than with other groups. The poorer classes tend to comply with this arrangement since they do not have the power to change these patterns.

During slavery the planters formed a plantocracy which ensured that they were in control. This was necessary because of the small number of plantation owners (or whites) which lived in the Caribbean. Because they owned the plantations and the slaves; controlled the institutions and the laws were made for their benefit, they therefore formed the upper class stratum. Below them were the coloureds and free slaves. Their ideologies and values were inspired by and depended on the colour gradations which the system perpetuated, that is the lighter the skin colour the more privileged the individual. At the bottom of the stratification system were the enslaved blacks (Mohammed 2007).

George Beckford in his theory of the plantation society states that the structure of the Caribbean is reflective of the structure of the colonial era (Mohammed). Colonialism instituted pigmentocracy in the social stratification system of the Caribbean region. This means that people who are of a fairer skin complexion are given more wealth, prestige and power than others in the society and were therefore at the upper end of the stratification structure. During slavery, the whites would forcibly cohabit with the Amerindians, Africans and Indian women. If the off springs of these unions looked more European they were dealt with more mercifully and some were educated.

Thus having these European traits was an avenue to 'social betterment', a black man who had been educated would marry of woman of lighter complexion in an attempt to assert his status within the society. Traditionally and even after the period of emancipation the stratification structure of the Caribbean had three main strata: the whites who were never in the lower classes, the coloreds and freed blacks and the enslaved blacks.

At the time of emancipation the social stratification structure of the Caribbean was the upper class white stratum, the brown middle stratum (with skilled and semi skilled labourers, traders and small business owners and a lower stratum of mainly black manual workers. According to C.L R James the middle class was somewhat characterized by educated colored individuals. He was quick to note that they were not part of the upper class (which controlled finance, industry and commerce) for 'racial

and historical' reasons. M.G Smith argued that movement from the middle to the upper stratum was based on race and the ownership of property. Modernization which followed the second World War altered the stratification patterns. Modernization expanded the opportunities of social mobility as the number of people needed to work in the service and manufacturing sectors increased (Smith 1965).

Derek Gordon in his study on social mobility in Jamaica stated that prospects for social mobility increased because of the expansion of occupational positions in the society. These opportunities for social mobility still remained unequal with respect to the race and from Gordon's research gender. His study points out that Jamaicans with parents who are agricultural labourers, domestic workers and manual labourers had 'virtually no chance of ending up at the top of the middle stratum.' This was the case for both men and women. He further states that for every 1000 person in the population only seven males and four females from a small farming background become managers or higher professionals (Gordon 1987).

Lloyd Braithwaite remarks in his study of the stratification system of Trinidad and Tobago that there was an emergence of a middle class within the Chinese, the East Indians and the Syrians who wanted to retain their ethnic identity by barring intermarriage with other groups with the exception of the upper class whites. Race and ethnicity determined the status of the individual's place in the stratification system (Ryan 1991).

Selwyn Ryan stipulated that the stratification system as described by Braithwaite no longer exists in Trinidad. He states that because the political power is currently mainly held by a black group (Peoples National Movement), there was an expansion of the public school system which in turn created a new educated elite. These elite displaced those who previously occupied strategic places in the political and educational system creating a new stratification structure (Ryan, 1991). These claims are corroborated by Reddock, who concludes that in Trinidad the Indians are the racial group which has experienced the greatest degree of social mobility. The middle class is now dominated by the "mixed group" as well as members of African descent which have made "moderate moves into the white collar occupations", (Ryan 1991).