



The Concept of Social Class Applied to Territorially Delimited Non-Specialized Tribes

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Abstract

At present, there is a large absence of work on social classes, especially in relation to territorially delimited societies that are not specialized in terms of labor. For a long time, studies concerning social classes were produced but, for the most part, they were applied to the post-industrial capitalist societies of Eastern Europe. The present research aims to expand the scarce existing knowledge on the possibility of applying the concept of «social class» to tribal societies. To achieve this objective, the historiography and the implications of the concept that accompanied its birth will be examined. Subsequently, its use will be examined with respect to the basic idea of conflict, and then the appropriateness of its use with respect to tribal societies will be contrasted. Finally, the hypothesis of the present research will be presented, whose basic idea indicates that there are similar features between social classes and tribal classes, that the use of the concept of tribal societies is inadvisable. Finally, the limits of the present proposal will be discussed.

Keywords: Class Consciousness; Conflict; Division of Labor; Possession; Transformation

Introduction

The first thing to consider when speaking of «social classes» is that its modern meaning comes from Marxist philosophy. Academic honesty tells us that we must continue, at least in a general way, the sense and meaning founded by Marx K [1] himself. The term «class» originally became widely used in the early 19th century and was fully involved in industrial development in Western Europe. The concept took on its significance in part taking the place of terms like «estates», «rank» and «order» -terms fully influenced by their medieval meaning «embedded» in a type of feudal economy and caste societies-to describe the main hierarchical groups existing.

Regardless of the great number of variations and interpretations that existed on the concept of «social class»,

all academic and popular criticism accepted that the final existing meaning of the concept came from Marx's ideas. To date, ideas on social stratification and hierarchical categories had been constructed. However, Marx's innovations went much further and associated social classes with phenomena such as: class structure, capitalist modes of production, means of production, class consciousness, conflict as an eternal form of social development and, above all, the definition of two significant classes from the 19th century onwards, a small class called the «bourgeoisie» or class of capitalists, and the broader and more common, the proletarian or working class. Marx's introduction of his social class analysis is canonical [2-4]. However, other authors had already developed the concept in a modern sense (post-feudal), such as Henri de Saint-Simon, Amand Bazard or Augustin Thierry. Others did so in a contemporary period for Marx, such as Max Stirner, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Mikhail Bakunin. In the 20th

century, likewise, the contributions of Lenin VI [5] in his 1902 work *What Is To Be Done?* and those of Lukács G [6] in 1923 in his *History and Class Consciousness* were canonical. Other intellectuals such as Lewis Coser, Ralf Dahrendorf, Pierre Bourdieu and Noam Chomsky also strongly developed the concept referring to social classes.

Implications of the Concept

Marx asserts that due to the differentiated division of labor, diverse classes emerge. Given that situation, the mode of production generates surplus goods and value, desired, cornered and retained by a minority group. As a consequence, the group benefiting from the surplus value is able to exploit the majority of labor producers. Marx's conception of «class», which was discussed by him in his last period, is not similar to what most of the later Marxists and interpreters assumed.

The concept of «class» (*Klass*) for Marxism is essentially negative, conflictive and attributed to the bourgeoisie. Likewise, it does not refer to the salary received by a worker, to his chances of improving his status or to his abilities or strength, but to what he receives and on what he has access to within the organization of a given society. In effect, social class refers to remuneration or capacity on the disposition of the existing means of production, something that determines the position and status occupied and established through the division of labor [5,7,8]. Not only to the existing social possession, but to the expected one.

The Marxist conception of social classes considers that there are two fundamental principles related to classes. The first is the transformation of labor or the manipulative and exchange labor of matter. The second is possession, which includes ownership, the creativity and the means of production. Between the two, transformation and possession, the relations of production unfold and through them social life creates the division of labor and struggles. Both principles, however, are developed through the same logic: the creation of consciousness and constant division between social groups-which in a certain sense emanates from the first premise, creating awareness. Social classes could be understood, in this sense, as large groups of individuals capable of transforming matter through their labor, who independently of their particularities, hold common interests based on the needs that the means of production generate in their times.

The Conflict

On the basis of the first Marxist considerations on social classes, which varied from the Weberian ones-based on the three-component theory of stratification, according to the interrelation among class, status and power-, any

form of social development based on classes is rooted in the permanent conflict between them. This occurs because the social classes, as large masses of the population, find themselves «trapped» in a situation that constantly recreates or reproduces itself. In this situation, every social relation ends up becoming a «form» of class relation-at least within post-industrial capitalist society in which cultural complexity becomes so high that every form of economic relationship is interrelated.

The class organization's built-in methods for moving up or down the vertical hierarchy are supported by the system's financial requirements. Since the social class structure is necessarily contradictory and paradoxical, it is also conflictual. An indispensable characteristic of social classes is that they are as antithetical as they are flexible. Essentially, if the foundation is based on the existing difference between groups, following Marx K, et al. [3] social groups will become larger and larger, and therefore the contradictions become deeper and deeper. In small, territorially defined and non-spatial groups, conflict develops through millenarian institutional phenomena such as marriage, punishment and beliefs. In absolute terms, social conflict between groups is irresolvable within a society with classes, castes, ranks, estates or, ultimately, status.

The last idea referred to, status, is crucial in relation to a practical investigation of conflict in territorially delimited and non-specialized tribes. The idea, mainly developed by Max Weber M [9,10], indicates that there is a cultural mechanism, based on prestige, which is assumed both psychologically and socially by the group, and whose objective is to make the stratification of positions solid through the communicative and material relationship. The concept of «status» guarantees that the individual, regardless of the magnitude of his group, perpetuates the conflict psychologically and feels committed to the reproductive interests of the hierarchical social model. Likewise, the conflict developed through status justifies the possession of private property, including tools, weapons, animals and land for tribes. In fact, the psychology of the status quo affects all forms of broad and regulated distribution-which does not prevent this distribution from being more or less equitable.

Weber's ideas about domination-and the consequent conflict between group members and groups-were more applicable than Marx's ideas about «cold» tribal societies since they were more psychological and cognitivist in character. Weber M [9,10] developed in a chapter entitled Status groups and classes, in his famous work *Economy and Society*, how domination was based on three conditions: legal-rational, traditional and charismatic. Two elements are key for Weber and can moderately explain the problems related to conflict, the nature of which is the obtaining,

possession and reproduction of domination. These two elements are legitimacy and bureaucracy. From the point of view of classical “cold” societies, bureaucracy can be understood in a symbolic way through the need of the group to generate and operate through rites, myths and practices aimed at reproducing tradition. Thus, it can be understood that problems concerning «class» conflict can affect both communal organizations (in Weber’s original German *Vergemeinschaftung*) and associative organizations (in the original *Vergesellschaftung*), where the former would be more common for territorially delimited and non-specialized tribes, and the latter for industrial societies. Tribes develop conflict by associating honor (authority) with social order and hierarchical organization of roles, so that social stratification is linked to the sense of belonging and the need to reproduce it strongly.

Distinctions between Tribes and Modern Social Classes

Is it appropriate to consider that «classes» exist within tribal societies? As we have seen, the idea of «social class» is embedded in social conflict. Thus, the formal consideration of «classes» must take place through conflict (whether this is called «class conflict», «class struggle» or simply «war of classes»). This is because both, transformation and possession, are based on the basis of social life and daily work. For that way of life, ownership and exchange are related to the exponential existence of members of society itself and to its complexity. The difference between tribes and the social classes of modernity can be understood under this premise: the passage from individual production and communal property to collective production and individual property [11-13].

In the past, everyday tribal farmers were just that, farmers; in the present, farmers as a whole are conceived of as «the peasantry», since Modernity, especially industrial modernity, changed the way not only of relating economically between groups, but also the way of conceiving themselves. The way in which post-industrial capitalist social classes create subsidiary capital (occasionally «landed capital») was crucial. Earlier, the transformation of labor and possession existed socially in a direct way, based on tradition and rootedness. But with the capitalist they are based on the nature of the relations of production and in the capital possibilities imagined in the future through the accumulation [14]. A sample of how the proletariat has been guided gradually to create more and more capital imagined since the mid-nineteenth century is in fact the meaning of the collective idea of «social class».

The main difference between the classic (for tribal societies) and the modern meaning (for post-industrial

societies) of «class», can be understood through the strata, groupings and elites created by capitalism. These events, strata, groupings and elites, could be considered as preludes to the formation of contemporary social classes. Such phenomena are not based solely on economic principles, but on purposes, positions, distinctions, memberships, skills, inherited experience and above all the collective recognition of their implications [14-16]. These social qualities are weakly assigned to individuals, occasionally appearing and disappearing in temporary periods, but strongly assigned through time and surrounding institutions. The ascribed social qualities were associated during the feudal period with priesthood, knights, military, artisans or princesses, but with the advent of capitalism the distinctions were occupied by others such as manufacturers, traders, merchants, craftspersons or industrialists. And later, with the apotheosis of the modern capital, with two social classes differentiated by their general capacity of access to wealth, social classes denominated by Engels F [7] as «bourgeoisie» (landlords, bankers and petty bourgeoisie) and «proletarian» (peasant, lumpen and pure proletariat).

«Class» Applied to Territorially Delimited Non-Specialized Tribes

Given that territorially delimited and non-specialized societies are still based on family or biological lineage, through class theory, clan societies were deemed to be more «primitive» than territorially structured nations, partly because the economic interests of urban citizens are, whether or not they wish to be so, channeled by the interests of nation states-which, in turn, are determined by the global economy. Clans, ethnologically analyzed as minimal units with a common organization, and tribes, commonly seen as a set of clans, differ in many aspects, but one of the main ones is the belief (strong or weak) in the existence of a common ancestor for all individuals in the group. Clan-based societies were thought to represent an evolutionary advance above societies organized simply by families-this could represent one of the first institutional manifestations of broad social groups larger than hunter-gatherers. Families and clans were compared to corporate legal entities that, like commercial corporations, endured forever without the help of their individual members. But through close analysis that clans and lineages could not constitute stable, culturally recognized entities, their patrilineages are purely based on small group interests such as ownership of cattle or common reactions to theft [17-19].

There are, however, certain similarities between tribes and social classes. Tribes, for example, have political and pseudo economic independent, geographical foundation, and are territorially based and delimited, something similar to modern nation states where classes develop their social

life. Likewise, the tribes possess cattle and family dominion over land, however, it is not until the strict development of social hierarchies that the public cultural resonance and mass reproduction constructs social classes. In the same way, tribal individuals are born with expected and desired ranks and merits, similar to what happens in an expanded and social way with some cultural distinctions such as nobility, royalty and elites [20].

Conclusion

The present study was designed to ascertain that following the academic tradition it is not possible to attribute the label of «social class» to territorially delimited and non-specialized tribes. The use of the concept of «social class» is inoperative from a Western and modern perspective for territorially delimited and non-specialized caste societies. However, it is useful when its use responds to a fully global interpretation, based on the economic development of capitalism understood as a complete system. The so-called «aborigines» or «pastoralists» tend to be more likely to mate with recognizable members of the lineage and also organize their offspring in unwritten ways through myths, rites and rituals. However, the main characteristic of aboriginal and pastoralist clans is as much about ownership as it is about punishment and communal feeling. The clans are politically autonomous but rely on ancestral beliefs to support communal politics. The tribes are able to create stronger institutions, capable of reproducing themselves almost «autonomously», but both are neither politically autonomous in an absolute way, nor economically self-sufficient, since they do not develop their economic activity in absolute isolation, but within a world economic system capable of affecting their interests, ways of life and capacity to obtain resources. One of the more significant conclusions from this research is that there is a crucial difference between tribal societies and the social classes of post-industrial Western Europe. It is suggested that an extensive field study would show that tribal hierarchical societies, regardless of the internal contradictions they develop, are incapable of creating their own collective class consciousness.

There are a number of important differences between the possibility of creating class consciousness and not having the capacity to do so. The main one refers to the focalization, channeling and realization of the class struggle against one's own class. Various studies have shown how different types of commodity holders (purely material or simply capitalist) and types of peasant, end up creating social groups not linked by descent or lineage, constituting essentially and in their final form caste-like organizations. It refers to their inability to create their own class consciousness, so that it is a class capable of competing and fighting against others, not against itself.

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