
Analysis Of The Estate System Of Social Stratification

Introduction

In our daily social life, when we people meeting, whether with a stranger or a friend, we are likely to classify them by a certain category of characteristics consciously or unconsciously. However, making categories not only applies to individual life, also societies have categories, as what the sociologists called stratification. Stratification is a way in which members of a society are divided and grouped into socioeconomic tiers according to their occupation and income, wealth and social status, social and political power, education, race, gender, etc.

Hence, estate system of stratification is a type of social stratification based on the control of land.

The estate system

Estate System were common in Europe and Asia during the Middle Ages and well into the 1800s. In estate system there was three estates groups that existed before the French revolution, first estate, second estate and third estate.

- The first estate: the first estate was the Clergy which comprised the church (those who prayed). The Clergy was made up of two types the Upper Clergy and the Lower Clergy, although there was not much difference between the two. For example, the upper clergy consisted of bishops and the lower clergy consisted of priests, monks and nuns. Their role was to ensure to ensure people well-being.
- The second estate: the second estate was the Nobility, it consisted of those who fought or the knights. The Nobility was made up of types Nobility of the Sword and Nobility of the Robe. Their role was to provide justice and were part of the royal court and administration.
- The third estate: the third estate was the Peasantry or Commoners, this group produced food for those who prayed and fought which were the first estate and the second estate. They were forced to pay more taxes which was favorable for the other two estates (the first estate and the second estate) and they started feeling oppressed due the little rights they were given. The hatefulness towards the higher taxes placed upon them by the other two estates was the foundation of a revolt.

The estate system is synonymous with the term feudalism which is a system of land ownership

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and duties (was used in the middle ages).

Characteristics of the estate system:

1. It was a legal practice, unlike slavery, and provided everyone rights and duties. The peasants were also allowed at public gatherings.
2. There was a broad distribution of labor in the estate system, the was no one was forced with violence of unwillingly made to work for longer hours. The Nobility duty was to protect them, the Clergy was the one to see their well-being and the Peasant always provided them with their basic needs like food or sanitation.
3. Unlike slavery, the estate system had well defined political groups that came with not only duties but rights.

Examples of societies that had estate sytems

Estate systems flourished in Europe until the French Revolution (1789) forcefully overthrew the existing order and provoked people in other nations with its cries for freedom and equality. As time went on, European estate systems slowly gave way to class systems of stratification. After the American colonies won their independence from Britain, the South had at least one characteristic of an estate system, the control of large plots of land by a relatively few wealthy individuals and their families, but it used slaves rather than peasants to work the land.

Much of Asia, especially China and Japan, also had estate systems. For centuries, China's large population lived as peasants in abject conditions and frequently engaged in peasant revolts. These escalated starting in the 1850s after the Chinese government raised taxes and charged peasants higher rents for the land on which they worked. After many more decades of political and economic strife, Communists took control of China in 1949. (DeFronzo, 2007)

Theories of stratification

For centuries, sociologists have analyzed social stratification, its root causes, and its effects on society. Theorists Karl Marx and Max Weber disagreed about the nature of class, in particular. Other sociologists applied traditional frameworks to stratification.

Karl Marx

Karl Marx based his conflict theory on the idea that modern society has only two classes of people: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

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The bourgeoisie: are the owners of the means of production, which are the factories, businesses, and equipment needed to produce wealth.

The proletariat: are the workers, they typically work for the bourgeoisies.

According to Marx, the bourgeoisie in capitalist societies exploit workers. The owners pay them enough to afford food and a place to live, but not to outgrow their status, the workers who do not realize they are being exploited, have a false consciousness, or a mistaken sense, that they are well off. They think they can count on their capitalist bosses to do what was best for them.

Marx foresaw a workers' revolution. As the rich grew richer, Marx hypothesized that workers would develop a true class awakening, or shared sense of brotherhood based on their common experience of exploitation by the bourgeoisie. The workers would unite and revolt in a global revolution. Once the dust settled after the revolution, the workers would then own the means of production, and the world would become communist. No one stratum would control the access to wealth. Everything would be owned equally by everyone.

Marx's vision did not come true. As societies modernized and grew larger, the working classes became more educated, acquiring specific job skills and achieving the kind of financial well-being that Marx never thought possible. Instead of increased exploitation, they came under the protection of unions and labor laws. Skilled factory workers and tradespeople eventually began to earn salaries that were similar to, or in some instances greater than, their middle-class counterparts, and the gap between the rich and the poor became increasingly bigger.

Max Weber

Max Weber was against Karl Marx's seemingly simplistic view of stratification. Weber argued that owning property, such as factories or equipment, is only part of what determines a person's social class. Social class for Weber, in addition to property or wealth, included power and prestige (People who run corporations without owning them still benefit from increased production and greater profits).

- Prestige and Property

Weber argued that property can bring prestige, since people tend to hold rich people in high regard. Prestige can also come from other sources, such as athletic, intellectual ability or entrepreneurship skills. In those instances, prestige can lead to property, if people are willing to pay and put in the work and effort for access to prestige. For Weber, wealth and prestige are linked.

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- Power and Wealth

Weber believed that social class is also a result of power, which is merely the ability of an individual to get his or her way, despite opposition. Wealthy people tend to be more powerful than poor people, and power can come from an individual's prestige.

Example: Donald Trump enjoyed prestige as socialite and as a TV personality, and he was also extremely wealthy. When he was elected as President of the United States of America, he became powerful as well.

Sociologists still consider social class to be a grouping of people with similar levels of wealth, prestige, and power.

Davis and Moore

Sociologists Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore believed that stratification serves an important function in society. In any society, a number of tasks must be accomplished. Some tasks, such as cleaning streets or serving coffee in a restaurant, are relatively simple. Other tasks, such as performing brain surgery or designing skyscrapers, are complicated and require more intelligence and training than the simple tasks. They believed those who perform the difficult tasks are therefore entitled to more power, prestige, and money. Davis and Moore believed that an unequal distribution of society's rewards is necessary to encourage people to take on the more complicated and important work that required many years of training. They believed that the rewards attached to a particular job reflect its importance to society.

Melvin Tumin

Sociologist Melvin Tumin was against Davis and Moore's theory. He disagreed with their assumption that the relative importance of a particular job can always be measured by how much money or prestige is given to the people who performed those jobs. That assumption made identifying and categorizing important jobs difficult. Were the jobs inherently important, or were they important because people received great rewards to perform them.

Estate system of stratification in modern times

In modern society estate systems have slowly been dissolved, but that does not mean it has eliminated stratification, in today's society, three stratification systems remain: slavery, a caste system, and a class system.

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Slavery

Slavery still exists today. Millions of people live under conditions that qualify as slavery, despite laws prohibiting it, but are being exposed due to platforms such as the internet.

For example: African countries like Mauritania, Sudan, Ghana, and Benin, slavery still very much exists as much as it did hundreds of years ago. In other parts of the world, including Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan, debt slavery (happens when people give themselves or are given to someone as slaves as security against a loan or when they inherit a debt from a relative) and Sex slavery (the forcing of girls into prostitution) is still common in Asia.

Caste System

A caste system is a social system which is based upon traits or characteristics that people possess as a result of their birth, because of their lineage they remain in these groups for the rest of their lives. This type of social system is an ascribed system, it can include race, gender, nationality, body type, and age. A caste system places people rigidly, no matter what a person does, he or she cannot change castes.

People often try to deter their ascribed statuses by changing their nationality, lying about their age, or undergoing plastic surgery to alter their body type. In some societies, this strategy works; in others, it does not.

For example:

1. Religion is an ascribed status in some societies. Zambia people may convert to other religions, but in other countries, people may not change out of the particular religion into which they were born.
2. The Indian government officially outlawed the caste system in 1949, but residues of it remain today.
3. The apartheid system of South Africa, the term apartheid refers to the total separation of the races. White Europeans colonized South and the area remained part of the British Empire until its independence in 1961. The policy of apartheid assigned black people to a caste far below that of whites. Black people could not vote, receive an education, or mix with whites in any way. The work of Nelson Mandela and others who fought for black equality have made apartheid illegal in South Africa, but, like the caste system in India, some prejudice and discrimination remain.

Class System

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In a class system, an individual's place in society is based on achieved statuses, which are statuses that we either earn or choose and that are not based upon where or to whom we were born. Those born within a class system can choose their educational level, religion, careers, and spouses. Social mobility is a major characteristic of the class system.

For example:

1. The term referred to as The American Dream is an indication of the American social class system. Americans believe that all people, regardless of the conditions into which they were born, have an equal chance to achieve success. Part of the American Dream is the belief that every child can grow up to be president of the United States. Former American president Barack Obama, for example, came from a relatively humble background and was of mixed race heritage but was perceived as predominantly black. Barack Obama rose above his humble beginnings to attend prestigious universities and enjoy a successful career in politics.
2. The other term is "living my best Caucasian life" which is a slang term means attaining financial security. This term is used by people who are not of Caucasian descent (white) because Caucasians historically have held more power and wealth.

Conclusion

In conclusion, even though estate stratification has been abolished, other systems of stratification are evident in all societies because of how its members are divided or grouped. A person's ability to move from his or her social position is established at birth.

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