

FROM INDIVIDUAL STATUS TO STATUS GROUPS AND LIFE STYLES

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Abstract. *The status position is defined by Weber as a social claim of the respect or of the reputation both in terms of positive and negative privileges. Starting from Bryan S. Turner's study regarding the status, we exemplify the phenomena by which the status defined by Weber is maintained and expresses: commensalism, monopolist satisfaction of the privileged access to fortune and power, connubium, conventions based on customs or on status. The study shows the differences between the individual status and the status groups, and also the essential differences between the group statuses and the social classes.*

Keywords: individual status, status groups, life styles

1. Introduction

Max Weber introduces in sociology an analysis style focused on the origins, the maintenance and the social consequence of the *status groups and communities*. By evaluating Weber's contributions to the sociology development, and also his subsequent influences, Jean Baudouin accomplishes an edifying synthesis and we have to remember certain aspects such as: *endowing* the contemporary political sociology with a personal, certain and recognized *abject, domination* that, "next to his logical correlation, territory and obedience, allow them to affirm his originality and the more and more disseminated field of social sciences"; *politics universalizing*, bring it again to some kind of basic invariant that is the *domination institutionalization*, being different from the "expression means by mobilizing another concept, the one of the trust in the validity of a political order"; combining a heuristic approach "that want to find in time and space the concrete means of appearance and institutionalization of the political domination". Thus, he opens the way of a new subject, also named *historical sociology*, a subject developed in the United States and that has influenced, at the same time, large areas of the contemporary French political Science.

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Regarding the analyses accomplished by Max Weber over the *status groups*, we have to specify that they represent an alternative to the analysis accomplished by Karl Marx over the economical classes. We practically introduce a point of view contrary to the one formulated by Karl Marx. Our approach is still focused on Weber's analyses and it accomplishes in the same time the transition from the individual status definitions to the status groups or communities notion or to the collective life styles notion.

2. Theoretical and Practical Aspects in the Field

Weber does not continue the American sociological tradition (focused especially on the individual status problems), but introduces a point of view regarding the groups and communities status, in their quality of integrative and combative social collectivises [1]. Therefore, in *Economy and Society*, Max Weber identifies different meaning of *status* and *prestige*, but, basing Turner's analyses, two of them are significant [1]:

a) The status as a system of *social situations*; a society (especially the feudal autarchic society) is divided depending on a series of cleavages generated by legal, customary, social and cultural privileges. These cleavages generate different and separated *cast groups*. In L.M. Bush and M. Keen's opinion, the status groups are constituted in social situations when their privileges are crystallized in a system of legal and economical immunities that do not suffer external control and regulations. This system is protected by tradition, religion and justice [2, 3];

b) The status groups or communities having historical and social functions, communities that share a similar life style, a unique moral code, a common language or culture, an also religious differences. The common cultural features lead to the constitution of separated and united communities. These communities are auto-organized in order to be protected and promoted by social and/or social benefits and privileges. "From this perspective, B.S. Turner notices, the social stratification refers to creating, maintaining and distributing different types of power in the society by means of the mechanisms of political monopoly, cultural reproduction and social exclusion" [1].

The sociological approaches regarding the status have led to other two notions correlated to it: the cultural status (the status, as a life style), and the status as a political-legal right (the civil component of the state) [1].

Standiche Lage (the status position) is defined by Weber as a social claim of the respect or of the reputation both in terms of positive and negative privileges. The status is based on a certain life style, a formal education, a formal prestige derived from certain occupational positions in society. Turner

exemplifies also the phenomena, means by which the status defined by Weber is maintained and it expresses: commensalism (common commitments regarding living and having meals), monopolist satisfaction of the privileged access to fortune and power, connubium (social solidarity boom of the marriage alliances), *conventions* based on customs or even on status [1]. *The status* is explained by Weber as a plurality of social actor who claim and obtain social honours and enjoy specific social privileges, in a larger social environment, and the *status groups* are common groups that have a privileged access to the rare resources, especially when these resources are correlated to certain cultural, moral or symbolic attributes [1].

Max Weber compares the economical classes and the status communities basing on two criteria: *the solidarity* and *their combative feature*. Thus, he sees in the economical classes aggregated by individuals united by a certain type of economical relationships (production, repartition, exchange, consume). Per contrary, the status groups have as a main feature *the community coordinate* (they are social collectivises of community nature). This feature demands the reproduction of a specific life style and the transmission of the cultural heritage. Being organized as a community, the status communities are auto-conserving, by eliminating the eventual entropic trends especially by this type of auto-organization (*as a community*).

By accomplishing their community organization, the status groups cover a double purpose: the protection purpose and the one of maintaining the social privileges and rights. Bryan S. Turner [1] foresees the fact that, by accomplishing these formal definitions, Weber followed the elaboration of certain comparative historical studies regarding the social structure and change. Thus, Weber tries to motivate that the economical wealth is not the only criterion to determine the social power and the influence. Moreover, he gives examples of societies where the prestige gained by education or culture outran the power based on means of production. The literary education that funds the professional qualification and the religious beliefs regarding the purification are arguments for illustrating the maintenance of certain status groups.

We mention here the work named *The Religion of China* where, by studying the Chinese society, Weber notices the political and cultural status of the literature people in more than twelve centuries. Some centuries, during which, in this country, the social degree was determined mainly by the professional qualification by reporting to the material conditions. "At its turn - Weber writes -, this qualification was and still is determined by education and especially by tests/examination. In almost the most exclusivist manner, China made the literary education to be the standard of the social prestige and, in this sense, it was much more exclusivist than Germany or Europe were during the

humanist period" [4]. What is the importance of this type of political and social status? From Weber's point of view, basing on certain comparative analyses, the cultural category professionally qualified in this field had a determinant role in maintaining the social stability and the traditions in Antique China. This fact was possible, as a consequence of a close relation between *Confucius' ethics* whose principle is assimilated by the respective cultural category and *the life style of the civil service*.

Being concerned by the style of the power relations in the human society, "in opposition with the formal development of the conceptual distinctions between class, status and party" [1], Weber analyses in *The Religion of India*, the ways the religious beliefs regarding purification had a very important role in organizing and maintaining the cast system [5].

We specified above that Max Weber used the concept of status groups in order to emit a point of view contrary to the concept of economical class analysed by Karl Marx, insisting on the *integrative, community* feature of the status groups, on their more advanced political consciousness, comparing to the economical political classes defined by him as being "aggregated in a market economy".

Thus, the status groups [1]: depend crucially on maintaining an exclusivist life style; the exclusivist life style is oriented towards preserving certain cultural monopolies; the status groups want to be reproduced by educational mechanisms; the reproduction of the status groups by education mechanisms has a double purpose: Forestalling the social mobility of the intruders and Emphasizing their exclusivity and their speciality.

In Lipset's line, Turner compares the opinion expressed by Thorstein Veblen [6] in 1899 to the idea of status groups developed by Weber. Lipset's observation is interesting [7]: "For Weber, as for Veblen, the function of the ostentatious waste – namely a emphasizing of the consume style from the pragmatic point of view, that needs many years of learning- was to prevent the mobility and to institutionalize the privileges of the ones who have reached to the top of the pyramid in the previous years or ages. The status groups may be identified depending on the specific life style."

The status groups are not immutable: beside the *organizing* coordinate that has as an ending the maintenance or the extension of the social privileges, a coordinate that makes secure the group by means of certain mechanisms of social closing (a mechanism that protects the monopolies from the existent privileges of intruders), the status groups also suppose the *usurper* coordinate. This provides a foreseen dynamicity, concretized in the process of increasing the benefits by report to the immediately superior status group (*usurpation*).

We must remember that the existence of the status groups involves *unavoidably* conflicts and social fights, even if most of these fight types may be disguised or hidden [1]. Basing on the facts exposed above, we have a new question: the social relationships are mainly *consensual* or, by their nature, are mainly *conflicts*?

Depending on the answer to this question, the sociologic theories are grouped in *theories of the concord* – that say that the order and the social stability are the result of accepting and assuming certain common values and desiderata [8] – and *theories of the conflict*- that spotlights the priority of the social conflicts, a priority concretized in their sizes and "*ubiquity* ", of tensions and of disorder. As a consequence, according to the theories of the conflict, the misunderstandings, the asperities, the disputes have a universal feature (both from the spatial point of view and from the one of the status groups), while the "areas" of harmony, understanding and concord are particular aspects of the social relationships[9].

Even if he also notices an intermediary position between the two theories- the position expressed by J.C. Alexander, who says that social relationships involve both the concord and the conflict -, Turner considers that the conflict sociology brings stronger arguments in approaching the status groups and the fight for the status: "in this study I try to prove that, by its nature, the status involves endless fights for the access to the rare resources, especially to the cultural ones" [1].

Turner justifies his option by the following arguments considered in elaborating his study: the trend to monopolies the advantages of belonging to a group by the groups themselves by social closing (excluding the contestants from owning privileges); the loyalty for the group makes the individuals' expectation to refer to benefits of belonging to the respective group, benefits that reinforce (by recompense) the loyalty; the social solidarity depends on distributing the recompenses and the privileges of a group members in exchange of perpetuating their belonging to that group [1].

Between solidarity and recompenses, the same relationship is perpetuated: "If solidarity depends on *matching* certain values and a certain general culture, we may also say that the belonging to the group represents, in a certain measure, a calculated choice of the members" [1].

Practically, we spotlight an exchange between the group members because the *belonging perspective* depends on the *continuity and the perpetuation* of the recompenses [10, 11]. In fact, at the half of the 20th century (1953), David Easton introduces a new vision over the policy and the politics, basing his conception regarding the *political behaviour*. Become "politics place", the

political system is analyzed as "an interactions system different from all the other social behaviours by means of which the values are to be imperatively attributed to a society" [12]. As a consequence, the social recompenses (inclusively at the groups level) represent a coordinate of the social control (the values are imperatively attributed), funding the improving of the members' desires to maintain the respective group. The scheme is classical: perpetuating the recompenses produces the belonging perpetuation and the belonging perpetuation (by perpetuating the desires) maintains in existence and functioning the status groups.

Conclusions

To the idea of imperatively distributing the values we link the idea of the status group *prestige*. B.S. Turner invokes here W.J. Goode who developed this feature of the social regulations – prestige – in his work named *The Celebration of Heroes*. Goode links directly the stability in frame of a social system to the social processes by means of which the prestige is offered to the members. By means of the formal recompenses offered by a public procedure, we accomplish the politics control over the social feature: the recompenses attributed in this way represent a tool for depositing the belonging, but also the tool by means of which we recognize the contribution brought in frame of the social group, the individual attachment to the group, the additional prestige won by the group etc. Prestige represents, in the same time, recognizing and public recompense, and respecting the recompenses provides the prestige perpetuation. Regarded from the perspective of the status group – individual's status relation, prestige objectifies hierarchies and (re)differentiations legalized by the imperatively distributed values.

And it cannot be different, since the recompenses and the honours represent or indicate also the values according to which a social group acts, and an individual's status in the group hierarchy is determined, at least partially, depending on the recompenses or formal prizes that were attributed. Making it simple, we may say that the group standardization is accomplished in a system of values, and the individual behaviour is appreciated and recompensed by the attachment to these values. And the attachment gradualism is measured in legalized hierarchies and, in the same time in imperative ones.

Being about hierarchies in the conditions in which the honours give hints regarding the dominant values in a society (group), it is certain that between the groups (and also inside them, between the individual), a competition develops.

Competition has a triple role: reconfirms the group belonging, providing the recompenses derived from the status; spotlights the system equity because it offers prizes for significant contributions; reinforces the legal authority of the status group: the existence of the honours confirms and reconfirms the aspect that the organization has the authority to offer recompenses.

Analyzing Goode's ideas, Turner notices that, in his opinion, "honours contribute to the reinforcement of the social commitment by providing the individuals' loyalty to the group, to an institution or a larger status community" [1].

The public procedure of granting recompenses involves dramatic aspects of the rituals accomplished on these occasions, fact that leads, according to Goods, to the accomplishment of a double purpose: creating and emphasizing the feeling of integrity and identity of the group; re-confirming the importance of the attachment to the group.

We have to say that many authors, among them, there are C.W. Mills and P.A. Taylor [13, 14], regard contextually-historically the privileges and the recompenses, noticing differences between societies and states regarding their presence.

It is normal – up to a point -, since there are differences between civilizations, values systems, life styles etc. Thus, in the feudal societies, the privileges are related especially to the noble titles, the existent inequalities perpetuating and accepting in this way the almost pre-established hierarchies. Chances equality, justice, equity are values specific to the modern age.

In fact, the aristocratic, traditional-feudal honours and recompenses did not feature all the societies. The authors mentioned above exemplify by the United States where the absence of the feudal tradition make these recompenses be absent. The American life style, founded in the American mind and the democratic equality impose reporting the recompenses to another values level and the prestige is a consequence of these realities. The system of formal prizes, by its competitiveness, becomes important by means of the fact that the American types of political organization are modelled also depending on the recompense criteria. This makes the status of a military hero, of a NASA researcher or of a cosmonaut to be placed, in the social hierarchy, over the status of an aristocrat who shows dramatically political values (Hills), a consequence of the superior appreciations granted by the society to the best ones. Taylor takes this idea further, insisting on the different effects of the recompenses derived from the status and on the ones of the general recompenses. Thus, while the recompenses derived from the status are constituted as a part of the *competitive and conflict* relationships between the

social groups, the general system of formal recompenses in a society may play an important role also in accomplishing the national unity and legalizing the national state.

Related to these conclusions, we think that, even if they bring many classifications in the presence of the discussed subject, they may reactivate unilateral or even exaggerated considerations of certain American sociology schools in the analysis of the historical evolution of the social stratification.

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