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A Critical Effort to View Modern Individuals through Max's Weber's Theory of Social Stratification

Max Weber's theory of Social Stratification can significantly define modern individuals' position in post-industrial modern society. Among the influential sociological thinkers including Karl Marx and Emile Durkheim, Weber's concept of class division appears to be the most pertinent to define modern individuals' existence in the society. Whereas Marx and Durkheim have heavily relied on an individual's capital and his ability to monetize his labor to explain his class-status, Weber is not willing enough to rely on an individual's ability to monetize labor and his possession of wealth only. In fact, Marx's and Durkheim's exclusive reliance on labor and wealth as the sole factors of social class have failed them to explain the distribution of power, a term which Weber uses to refer to the "chance of a man or a number of men to realize their will in a communal action even against the resistance of others" (Weber, 1968, p. 180). Marxian sociologists believe that power solely derives from a person's economic power. But on the contrary, Weber holds the view that economic power (in Weber's words, "economically conditioned power") is a derivative of power which itself derives from the interplay among a person's or a group of persons' 'class, status and party'. I think, Weber's 'three components theory' of Social stratifications is well efficient to explain individuals' position in post industrial modern society. It is remarkable that 'increasing divisions of labor', the subsequent 'differentiation in social role' and the 'specializations of social functions' are three unanimously acknowledged factors which induced modernization and the rise of the individual, as Filloux (1993) says, "Since modern society is based on growing industrialization and increasing division

of labour, the result is a greater degree of differentiation in social roles, the specialization of social functions and, eventually, a risk that ‘social solidarity’ will disintegrate” (p. 5) The shift in the mode of labor initiated the change in the social structure as well as individual’s anomic state.

Furthermore, the materialization of new collective labor-based identity have a tendency to be translated into new representative institution on the condition that these representative institutions must be relate to the social needs of the new class. But this labor-based social orientation of an individual is not able to define individuals’ racial status, ethnic status and democratic power, and its power derivatives. More obviously such orientation also fails to explain the power of a group of individuals in a democratic political system. Even the capitalist in democratic political system do not enjoy the scope of exerting direct power, as the Marxian scholars claim it to be so. But Weber’s willingness to view “class, status and parties” as “phenomena of the distribution of power within a community” necessarily entails that an individual is a unitary function of a class, a status group and a party, which are superimposed with an overall balance of power. Though this unitary function of power subconsciously within its class and status group, it actively participates in a party to accumulate power to reach their end. In order to understand my appliance of Weber’s social stratification theory in defining the individuals’ orientation in modern democratic capitalist society, it is necessary to have a clear idea of Weber’s terminologies such as “class”, “status group” and “party”. According to Weber, a class is not a community; rather it is a group of individuals who share the same frequent communal actions. His concept of class is mostly

economic in nature and determined by the commonalities of a group of people's economic struggles and actions, as he says, "[Class] is the most elemental economic fact that the way in which the disposition over material property is distributed among a plurality of people, meeting competitively in the market for the purpose of exchange..." (Weber, 1968, p. 181) For example, the middle class people are those who belong to intermediary income-earning group and share a communal pattern of the possession of property and wealth, as Timothy Shortell (n. d.) says, " The possession of property defines the main class difference, according to Weber" (pars. 8). According to Weber's concept, there are other classes too such as working class, proletariats, etc. In contrast to a class's position in the economic order, a status group belongs to a social order. In this regard, Weber says, " Both propertied and propertyless people can belong to the same status group" (Weber, 1968, p. 187). This proposition of Weber necessarily defines an individual's, whether he is a man of wealth or not, political power in democratic political system. Since an individual's political power in the democratic political system is determined by the class interest of his class to a great extent, he or she can be crowned with the mandatory representative power of that particular class which he or she belongs to. Weber's social stratification theory is more eloquent in defining the individual's existence in modern democratic and capitalist society than Marx's and Durkheim's labor-based social orientation of individuals. His concepts of ' classes and ' status group' successfully define an individual's superimposed inheritance to both a class and a social status. In post industrial society, democracy can be considered as the direct consequence of the rise of individualism which itself

is the result of increasing division of labor. Labor-based orientation is not sufficient to define the individuals' position and its power derivatives in the society. Weber asserts that simultaneously as well as subconsciously a person can belong to several class and status groups. But he actively participates in a party in order to achieve goals. References Filloux, J. (1993). "Emile Durkheim", UNESCO: International Bureau of Education, vol. 23, no. 1/2, p. 303-320. Shortell, T. (n. d.). "Weber's Theory of Social Class", Department of Sociology, Brooklyn College, CUNY. Retrieved 18th October, 2013 from [http://www. brooklyn soc. org/courses/43. 1/weber. html](http://www.brooklyn soc. org/courses/43. 1/weber. html) Weber, M. (1968). *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, New York, Bedminster Press, 1968. HM57 W342