

Soc1005s assignment 1 jmsjas001

[Politics](#), [Communism](#)



Soc1005s Assignment 1 JMSJAS001 Jason Jamieson 21/8/2008 South African society has undergone rapid change over the last two decades, it has shifted from an almost socialist apartheid society whereby segregation and class struggle were rife to a post apartheid society that is still home to segregation and class division but has changed constitutionally to allow for freedom and expression free of oppression. South African society is however still facing inequality that is increasing rapidly, this inequality is caused by political, social and economic factors. This essay will compare the Weber and Marx theories of class as well as relate these theories to the present day class divisions of South Africa. Weber's theory of class is one where class as well as status causes conflict. Society is divided into four main classes these classes are divided by status rather than wealth and the conflict caused by this 'status' can be due to various factors. Things such as education, lifestyle and consumption can distinguish status within a Weberian society. Life chances are also regarded as status in a Weberian view as those who did not receive life chances that someone else received will immediately view that person as having a higher status than they do, this example is prolific in the novel by Rhampele whereby people who escaped township living were frowned upon by the people who remained behind. Marx's theory of class struggle is slightly different to Weber's in the sense that class division is based on exploitation rather than status, exploitation being the control that the bourgeois have over the working class, this control is maintained because the bourgeois have control over the means of production. Marx views the free trade of capitalist economies as 'exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusion, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct,

brutal exploitation.’(Marx, Karl and freidrich `engels (originally 1848), The communist manifesto, chapter 1, “ Bourgeois and Proletarians’.) This is a very crude depiction of Marxism, whereby the capitalist system is viewed as the machine that the bourgeois use to exploit social labour. The Marxist theory is one that is best described as conflict between two classes, which results in collective action mainly from the subordinate group. The similarity between Marxist theory and Weber theory is that they both say that whoever owns the means of production is in the driving seat of society with the bourgeois running the government and nationalization being the main priority of the ruling class in order to maintain power. The introduction of apartheid saw the polarisation of south African society on a social scale, this was followed by a polarization on an economical scale whereby black mine workers were being exploited by white bourgeois for cheap labour. Although this exploitation took form in an economic capacity it still correlates with Marx’s suggestion that class division is a division based on relationship rather than assets. The industrial revolution was a good example of this whereby black mine workers were identified by number rather than name, giving one the impression that they were viewed as commodities rather than people. The formation of trade unions also hastened the splitting of the classes as it showed that the black population recognized that they were being exploited. The Weberian understanding of class in south Africa is different to that of Marxist understanding, it’s structured into four class categories which I believe is more fitting to South African society of today as it more accurately represents the economic and social positions of the population. Apartheid in South Africa is viewed by Weber as the time of an

emerging African middle class, “ this middle class was well educated. This well educated middle class suggested that that all the “ decent people" were educated"(Jeremy Seekings, 2008. Lecture notes.) The mindset that the emerging middle class adopted about those who weren't educated is a good example of status division within a class of people. Whilst at the same time these educated African middle class looked down on those who weren't so fortunate, so did the uneducated view the emerging middle class as outcasts. This mindset toward one another is difficult to categorise into class or status but it does say that education was recognized as inequality within African society under the apartheid regime. The post apartheid regime carried some of the characteristics from the past and still today the educated middle class African people are viewed by their uneducated counter parts as traitors etc. Is this now a division of status or class? There are also other factors that could influence such thinking patterns within communities, such as cultural traditions of witchcraft and patriarchy. Society after apartheid is one that is difficult to categorise, education, tradition as well as material wealth all contribute to class and status division. Class and status are also defined by the workplace, the workplace was structured by apartheid and this structure still affects the workplaces of today. The article by Karl von Holdt suggests that because black labourers were marginalized under the apartheid regime it instilled a mindset in them that they are inferior. This mindset has prevented black society from uplifting itself out of poverty and it has also resulted in the ridicule of people who have managed to better themselves. Segregation in the workplace at the high veld steel mill resulted in the deskilling of the black population; this deskilling hampers the black

community even today. The deskilling has put a ceiling on the level at which a black worker can progress, ultimately defining status and class. From my own experience working in hotel close to where I live, it is very evident that the employees who are natively from south Africa seem to have a mindset that there is a limit to what they can achieve and a ceiling to the level that they can rise to, this contrasts greatly with the mindset of the workers who are from other African countries like Congo, Malawi etc. The employees from these foreign African countries don't seem to have limitations to what they can succeed I personally believe that apartheid was a mould which shaped the African working class into what it is today and can be blamed for the lack of ambition that is found in the majority of the working class black population. South African society has become a cosmopolitan of classes, it is difficult to pin point the exact problem that society in South Africa has but it is clear that both Weber and Marx contribute to a better understanding of class struggle within South Africa. Referencing Von Holdt, Karl , 2003. Transitions from below. University of kwazulu Natal Press. Ramphela, Mamphela, 2002. Steering by the stars. NB publishers. Marx, Karl and freidrich `engels (originally 1848), The communist manifesto, chapter 1, “ Bourgeois and Proletarians’ Seekings, Jeremy. 2008 Lecture notes.