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2

Analysing Social Structures

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1. Introduction

Although social structure might seem the most important concept in sociology, and one of the major concepts in social science more generally, it is something of an 'absent presence' with many theorists addressing the issue only tangentially and with sustained attention to conceptual understanding of the nature of social structures attended to by only relatively few authors (Crothers, 1996). The history of the concept of social structure in sociology (and outside) is a topic addressed briefly here only to indicate the historical development of conceptual work on it (see Callinicos, 2007; Crothers, 1996, 2004).

Phases in the development of sociological theory concerning social structure has been described in the references just noted. Many early accounts of social structure depicted a sequence of three or four successive types beginning with hunter-gatherer bands and encompassing empires, and civilisations, together with the unique features of Western modernity. As empirical sociology developed with the work of the Chicago school (and more generally in community studies) in the interwar years more empirically based (but still dynamic) accounts were developed. Immediately before, during and after the world war 2 period the functionalist approach (partially adapted by Merton from anthropological models to better fit with more complex societies) switched attention from over-time change to understandings of how social structures fitted together and how they worked as structures. In particular, structures were seen as often operating 'behind the backs' of the people in them and were laced together in considerable part through 'latent functions' that were not always immediately obvious. By the 1970s, sociological theorists began to distance themselves from some of the determinism associated with previous approaches, and social structures began to be seen as more complex performances that arose out of the interplay between people's agency and the social environments shaping them and in turn being formed by individual actions. The two most prominent of these theorists were Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens (although many others reinforced this approach) and these were sometimes labeled as 'reproduction, practise or structurationist theorists. Since then, an array of commentary has ensued which has elicited (and partially resolved) many of the difficulties in the analyses of these theorists – Giddens fails to develop a convincing rendition of social structure whereas Bourdieu, which attempting valiantly to overcome some of the dichotomies which constrain sociological analyses, overemphasises structural determinants. Moreover, sharp critique of any collectivist models continue with many sociologists unprepared to admit the existence of collectivities other than as representations held at a micro-social level. Moreover, while 'post-structurationist' approaches (such as the

work of Margaret Archer and Nicos Mouzelis and a range of commentators) seem to have developed sophisticated argumentation, it has yet to be widely accepted. Indeed, there is an argument that – strangely – social theorists tend to shy away from direct treatment of social structure.

Exposition of analytical tools in sociology (as much as any other sociology) needs to be accompanied with rigorous criticism as to their adequacy, but this too has to be eschewed in this presentation. The emphasis rather is on providing tools for use. Sociology might seem to be stymied without a working consensus on what the ontological structures of social structures might be with debate structured by some sophisticated conceptions of collectivities on the one hand (e.g. Elder-Vass, 2010: also Searle, 2010) and vigorous renditions of methodological individualism on the other (e.g. Martin and Dennis, 2010: see also Martin, 2009). A major difficulty in developing adequate conceptions of social collectivities are the arguments deployed against their very possibility: if it is argued that collectivities do not exist in makes little sense to pursue further considerations of them – a self-fulfilling prophecy. And it is possible that ultimately a collectivist position will prevail, but it should not prevail without sufficient weight being given the effort of endeavouring to establish the possibility that collectivities might meaningfully exist. However, it is not entirely the task of an empirically-orientated discipline to worry too much about the philosophical status of its concepts. The empirically-orientated study of social structures need not await the final verdict of its more philosophical associated discussions, although it is good if the two can develop alongside and in interaction with each other.

Unfortunately, the more empirically-orientated study of social structure flows within several channels which are not entirely linked to eachother. Some approaches hold rather different conceptions of the same term - social structure – while others pursue the study of social structure using other terminologies. This chapter provides a schema for bringing to bear this systematic array of concepts for examining the various aspects of social structures.

Social structures are at least somewhat-enduring sets of relationships amongst a group of roles which emerge, are maintained, change and eventually cease. They vary enormously between tightly drilled formations such as elite combat units or sports teams (which operate like highly oiled social machines with their social structure clearly somewhat embodied in the team's physical and behavioural routines) to loosely organised networks or relationships which may operate in subtle and usually unglimpsed ways, but nevertheless are framed by structure. While some social structures are adorned with a massive cultural apparatus or largely focused on the development of cultural goods, others are very lean. Whereas one extreme type is the endlessly interacting face to face groups (e.g. 'primary groups') the other extreme are aggregations where people belong to social categories (sometimes widely spread across space) which shape their attitudes and behaviour but which are not (or seldom) reinforced by interaction – so some social structures are local while others are cosmopolitan. Some are small and others vast in their extension over space and/or time. They differ in the way their 'footprint' is distributed across various micro-level social situations and underlying natural environments. Perhaps above all, different social structures vary in their self-awareness and in their capacity for collective or planned action. An interpenetrating set of social structures are the social forms in which people live out their lives and which to varying degrees are built into specific social formations such as communities or societies.

The chapter draws on the immense array of sociological concepts to provide the array of analytical tools needed to understand the various dimensions of social structures. (A developed alternative is Giddens, 1984. See also Layder 2006; Lockwood, 1992; Lopez and Scott, 2000; Lopez, 2003; Mouzelis, 2008; Porpora, 1987; Sewell, 2005; Tilly, 2008).The key concepts examined in the chapter include cultures and ideologies, institutions, organisations, networks, categories, roles and statuses, resources or capitals, situations, scenes, selves, ecologies, actions and interactions, life-choices and life-chances, and social formations (communities, societies). As well as examining each of these, frameworks are presented about how each relate to each other.

The approach adopted is a 'toolkit' one in which the various perspectives are called upon for examining different aspects of social structure as analyses suggest relevance. My argument is that to successfully understand any social structure, many (maybe all) of these perspectives will need to be brought to bear. To some degree, the perspectives compete with each other, but they are by no means intrinsically incompatible. The tools covered are not exhaustive, but they do cover most of the tools needed to analyse social structures.

The perspectives are presented in an ordered sequence in which foundations are laid and then more particular aspects built on these. The sequence also moves from small-scale to larger-scale and from static to dynamic. However, to some extent this ordering is arbitrary and the perspectives blur. Others might prefer different orders. The tools provide spell out an implicit underlying framework and show how it can be put to work.

2. Levels and processes

The conceptual tools fall into two main classes. The first group are perspectives which allow us to understand the 'architecture' of social structures: how they are built. The following perspectives covered are orientated towards social processes. Having set up the structure, as it were, we can then set the structure to work, to mobilise it into operation and to see how it maintains itself but also changes. Separating out these two perspectives is arbitrary but useful to guide thinking. There are two important contexts which bear on social structures. Social life takes place over time and it is inevitably spatial, and these should be elements in any analysis from each of the perspectives already covered, and since this contextual approach is sometimes forgotten, its importance needs to be emphasised even though since these aspects are integral they are not sign-posted by giving them separate attention.

As well as conceptualising social structures complementary concepts are needed to cover how people feel about the way they are inserted in social structures, and this aspect is handled through discussions of the concepts of social identity and of life-course.

This chapter refers only in passing to the bio-social and ecological-social settings within which social life is lived and concerning which social structural analyses take place. Any 'population' of people is based on the physical/environmental territory within which it lives (including extensions obtained by import and export) and is also embodied within a particular biological set of bodies which have various marked characteristics (e.g. gender, age, maybe 'beauty', 'health', strength etc.) and in turn an underlying genetic structure. It is assumed that social structures will be built on and will actively 'draw on' and be limited by various of these conditions, but these issues are not further addressed in this chapter.

The study of people's lives is not exhausted by social structural analyses. Such analyses merely endeavour to understand what is involved with people's experiences, activities and longer term fates as these are caught up within social structures, but which remain unique to each individual within them.

3. Units

3.1 Levels of units

The sequence builds up from a foundation towards higher levels of organisation:

- situations and scenes
- statuses and roles occupied by people
- social networks and quasi-groups
- groups and organisations
- 'fields' and institutional areas
- societies and cultures
- civilisations and world systems
- social identities.

This hierarchy has been carefully developed and it is argued (although not definitively) that each of these levels have particular properties which separate it from those lying at other levels in the hierarchy.

At each of these levels, the social unit focused on has 'internal' and 'external' features: the elements that make it up and its relationships to other units within which it is contextualized. In a network approach, which is a major way of investigating the latter issue, relations between nodes are studied, not characteristics of nodes themselves. Network linkages within any type of social entity (e.g. between individuals but also between organisations) are possible. This interest in linkages can be taken to **follow** approaches looking at characteristics of social entities (on the grounds that you need to know something about x and about y before you examine their relationship). However, often network analysis is seen as the study of relationships amongst people rather than relations amongst any type of social unit as it is depicted in this chapter.

It is important to note that the various levels do NOT neatly (at least not necessarily) nest within each other in a linked-up hierarchy. Social structures at various levels cross-cut and interweave and may (or may not) have any connection with others operating at different scales or with different trajectories.

3.2 Situations and scenes

The round of everyday life consists in a series of encounters with others in 'social situations' which are in turn often physically embedded in 'scenes'. Goffman referred to this highly encompassing level of social life as the 'interactional order' although broader terms are used by other sociologists. Situations differ in whether or not they are focused or unfocused and are sites in which we perform the day to day manoeuvres and tasks of our lives. Situations shape behaviour since in most we endeavour to present our 'selves' in a good light and to cover up mistakes and difficulties. The whole panoply of concepts developed by social interaction sociology applied very vividly at this level. Some sociologists see situations as so

enveloping that they refuse to recognise the existence of any social units at a 'higher' level that encompass situations and those social integrationists who do emphasise the socially constructed nature of any larger social entity. Situations are embedded in flows and sequences which are partly designed (as in the day to day scheduling of many activities) and partly (and occasionally totally) unplanned and replete with exigencies, which those involved must react to.

Socially-constructed scenes (such as buildings, stages, streets, rooms) are the physical backdrop for situations and can shape these, but they also have a social life of their own since they may be occupied in turn by various groupings which place their own meanings and behaviours on how the setting gets used.

3.3 Roles/Social categories

For many sociologists, the main building-block of social structure is the status-role. The usefulness of this concept is that it links both upwards to more comprehensive social structures (which can be seen as composed of combinations of status-roles), and also downwards to the nitty-gritty of the practise of everyday life (since people often relate their behaviour to the status-role position they hold).

Role analysis is built on the everyday point that we create our own identity and also relate with others in terms of key social characteristics such as our (and their) age and gender, as well as many other more societally-relevant (and also the more fluid situationally-specific) roles.

The concept is borrowed from the theatre, where of course it refers to the characters in the cast which are played by actors. This metaphor is especially stressed by those focusing on the 'playing of roles': i.e. the performance of roles. What is more interesting, I think, is that other aspects of the theatrical metaphor are not stressed. The whole structural context that is indicated by looking beyond the playing of the actor's lines to consider the relevance of the playwright, the plot, and the relationships amongst the characters that the cast conjures up, is not attended to.

There is a central tension within the concept between the 'status-position' aspect of the concept, and the enactment 'role' aspect: between a position in a social structure, and the behaviour and attitudes of a person occupying that social position. Clearly, these are interrelated aspects, and sometimes they are said to be 'two sides of the same coin'. However, the two aspects are differentially seized on by different approaches to the study of social roles: sometimes labelled the structural and the interactional views of roles. (One difficulty with the term 'status' is that its more normal English usage implies a definite hierarchical aspect. In this sociological usage, it does not have this meaning, but this can be confused. Statuses of course can differ in their 'status', since hierarchical ranking is often an attribute of a status.)

A status is a position in a framework of statuses to which are assigned behavioural standards, tasks, and resources. The term has both denotations and connotations: statuses have both relatively up-front 'formal requirements' as well as a tail of less-defined 'informal requirements'. For example, teachers are not only expected to carry out the technical tasks of classroom teaching, but also may have further expectations placed on them of how they should conduct themselves in the community at large.

Any single status relates to several different audiences or complementary status-positions: e.g. school-teacher in relation to school-principal, fellow teachers, students, parents etc. Thus, it can be seen that the slice of the status relating to each separate one of these is a 'role-segment', and the related positions are 'role-complements'. The total set of audiences or role-complements can be referred to as the 'role-set'.

Any person will occupy a range of status-positions at any one time, and even more over time. The set of statuses which a person occupies at one time can be referred to as their 'status-set': for example, consisting of someone who is '..a teacher, wife, mother, Catholic, Republican and so on' (Merton 1968:423). Certain combinations of these tend to be more complementary or more expected. Also, status-sets may be anchored in a crucial 'master-status' (e.g. ethnicity under many circumstances will be a crucial status, age or gender often can be too).

Finally, over time (to anticipate a point to be made in the last of the substantive sections of this chapter), people move in various ways through this social apparatus. Often there are quite regular sequences of roles or of statuses which people occupy one after another. These established sequences provide an over-time link between each component role or status in the sequence. Obvious examples include (especially for males) the sequence of apprenticeship, through journeyman status, to master artisan.

The first main use of status-role theory is as a framework on which to hang sociographic descriptions. Many studies have been carried out on particular statuses, as they are such convenient peg-boards for this. Such studies depict what tasks those in a status perform, and other social characteristics which are assigned to them. Another usage is to develop a role-inventory, in which the array of statuses in a society is exhaustively listed: and often what the tasks of each are. Another common study is to catalogue which tasks are assigned to which statuses (e.g. men v women) across different societies.

But these are but preliminaries for sociological explanations of people's behaviour in statuses. One line of explanation is cultural. Statuses are to a considerable degree a crystallisation of a bundle of norms or rules that is linked to a particular position. Indeed, one line of interpretation of roles is that each is neatly derived from the overall master-values of a particular culture, and as a result of being anchored in this more abstract cultural unity, the division into nicely-complementary roles ensures that society functions smoothly. However, social reality is seldom so neatly organised, to say the least.

Instead, the sociological point is more that those occupying roles are shaped by those occupying the surrounding role-structures. There are at least two main lines of explanation of people's behaviour and attitudes within status-and-role theory. One line of explanation involves people in statuses being 'socialised into' (i.e. learning) their roles, which they then 'internalise' (i.e. when the learning becomes part of their social identity). In this conception, the person learns the 'script' prepared by the social structure for that position, and usually does this so well that, after some fumbling starts, they are able to perform effortlessly on numerous occasions.

An alternative, and complementary, explanation emphasises 'social control' by those in the 'role-set'. The role-complements monitor the behaviour of the incumbent and endeavour to shape the incumbents' behaviour (and maybe their attitudes) to fit or suit the role-

complements' views and expectations. This social control then locks the incumbents into patterns of reasonably acceptable actions.

Alongside the social control aspect is that of social rewards. Role behaviour is as much shaped by reward-possibilities as it is by negative sanctions. In the industrial relations arena, for example, much attention is given the impact of different types of rewards for worker productivity and also morale. For example, piece-rates can induce high output, but at a social cost. Associated with reward is the way of monitoring and measuring performance to allow the rewards to be assigned. This too, can have a marked influence on what happens. For example, amongst university academic staff, research tends to be rewarded, as research output appears to be more readily measured, whereas teaching performance is difficult to monitor and thus reward: therefore academics are more likely to put effort into their research at the expense of teaching or administration in order to obtain promotion.

The operation of reward and control mechanisms is seen as rather more complicated in the 'reference-group theory' approach (e.g. Merton 1968, see also Crothers, 2011). This approach suggests that people more or less actively search out the reference framework they will relate to in occupying a status. Usually the role-complements, perhaps especially those in appropriate role-segments (e.g. for a teacher, other professional colleagues) are the group to which someone orientates themselves. However, they may (also) fix their sights on quite a different reference-group. For example, upwardly mobile people may be more orientated to the views of the strata they are moving into than the strata from which they are coming. Some reference-groups may be abstract 'social categories' (sometimes technically referred to as 'non-membership groups': a rather indecorous term!), or even specific people who are chosen as 'role-models'.

An important point about status-positions is that it is through the ways in which they are organised that wider social structures can be held together or fissures created. Nadel (1957) had pointed out that very often different role-structures do not mesh with each other so that wider social formations are not integrated through them. For example, the age-order and gender-differentiation do not necessarily mesh. However, sometimes particular role-structures have a role in mediating between others (e.g. judiciary, political leadership). One important way in which wider social orders are held together is through the mutual occupancy of statuses in status-sets. For example, it may be by virtue that a decision-maker is both a business-person and a parent and partner that business decision-making may at least be aware of the familial circumstances attending business change.

One implication of the multiple occupancy of statuses, and also of the multiple role-complements focusing on (parts of) particular statuses is that quite a lot of conflict can be induced. In any particular status, and also for the set of statuses, an individual usually has only limited time, and other resources, which must be rationed around all their statuses or the role-segments. In addition, the different values associated with different statuses or role-segments can create strain. For example, principals, fellow-teachers, pupils and parents can all have rather different expectations of a teacher, and it can be very difficult to balance these into a coherent approach. Similarly, at the status-set level, a classic difficulty arises in endeavouring to balance family and work roles.

Merton has listed several mechanisms which provide status or role occupants with ways of handling these pressures. Tensions in role-sets may be handled by social mechanisms such as (as summarised in Crothers 1987:96):

- differing intensity of role-involvement among those in the role-set (some role-relationships are central and others peripheral);
- differences in power amongst those involved in a role-set;
- insulating role-activities from observability by members of the role-set;
- observability by members of the role-set of their conflicting demands upon the occupants of a social status (this mechanism offsets 'pluralistic ignorance': the situation of unawareness of the extent to which values are in fact shared);
- social support by others in similar social statuses and thus with similar difficulties in coping with an un-integrated role-set;
- abridging the role-set (breaking off particular role-relationships).

Similarly, Merton has suggested cognate mechanisms they may handle stress in status-sets (Crothers 1987:94):

- perception by others in the status-set of competing obligations (e.g. employees are to a degree recognised to have families);
- shared agreement on the relative importance of conflicting status-obligations;
- self-selection of successive statuses that lessen differences between the values learned in earlier-held statuses and those pertaining in later statuses;
- self-selection of statuses which are 'neutral' to one another.

A major sociological theme has been that stress arises from awkward combinations of statuses that a person holds. Lenski introduced the notion of 'status inconsistency' which hypothesised that those people occupying 'incongruent' status-sets might suffer increased social stress - or that there might be other consequences that flow from their 'cross-pressure' situation. There are a variety of effects which might follow from 'minority' or 'unusual' situations.

Rose Coser (1991) has moved beyond this stress or conflict view to emphasise the positive opportunities opened up by more complex status-sets. She argues that it is within the very interstices opened-up by complex status-sets that wider degrees of individual freedom can come to be realised. One aspect of this is that people learn more sophisticated social skills - including linguistic flexibility - as they learn to handle role complexity. It may also be that more energy is generated as a result of the interplay between statuses. There are also possibilities for integration and for innovation.

3.4 'Social networks' and 'Quasi-groups'

Network analysis draws out the everyday point that one way of locating yourself in relation to other people is, not just in terms of what characteristics you have (e.g. gender, age), but 'who you know', or more generally what sort of people you associate with. Although others have used this term in different ways (notably Dahrendorf 1968), I portray networks as 'quasi-groups': that is, as a form of social organisation that links people but which need not be as formally organised and clearly bounded as 'proper' groups are.

The root metaphor in this approach is that of webs and graphs. Fischer (cited in Wilson, 1983: 54) puts it well:

'Society affects us largely through tugs on the strands of our networks - shaping our attitudes, providing opportunities, making demands on us, and so forth. And it is by

tugging at those same strands that we make our individual impact on society - influencing other people's opinions, obtaining favours from 'insiders', forming action groups'.

Another, more aggregated, way of conceptualising network linkages is in terms of Bourdieu's concept of 'social capital' (which has also been picked up network analysts such as Coleman 1990: see also Bourdieu, & Wacquant, 1992, Lin, 2001). Social capital is seen by Bourdieu as, in effect, the 'linkage reach' of people, and especially the extent to which they can convert other forms of capital into effective use.

One strength of network approaches is that they detect patterns of social life operating beneath and around more formal structures. For example, working class residential communities may not be studded with links through formal organisations, and, therefore, may appear to the casual observer to be devoid of social structure. Whereas, in fact, they may be quite tightly interlaced by informal social links. Another strength is that network analysis can probe behind surface patterns of links to show indirect paths of contact, mediated through other people or collective units. Yet another emphasis in network analysis is on actual, concrete links between actual units, rather than rather more vague pictures of expectations and possibilities, which is where role analysis often leaves matters.

Network analysts vary in the vigour and exclusiveness of their stance: the most radical denigrate any attention to people's opinions and views, seeing these as emanations of their network position. The **form** of relationships is often stressed over their **content.**

A very important distinction is that between 'network cohesion' and 'structural equivalence'. The two ideas posit quite different ways of examining nodes and their linkages. The network cohesion concept links those who interact with each other: for example, in a medical centre each set of patients, receptionists, practise nurses and doctor form a network based around each particular doctor. However, each of these four types of position are the basis for network links based on the 'structural equivalence' of the people concerned. That is, each plays an equivalent role in 'their' network, and analysis can be built around this similarity. Often these positions are, in fact, also socially prescribed status-roles, but they need not be. Nodes can occupy 'structurally equivalent' positions without this being formally recognised by the culture.

One key idea is the importance of 'weak ties'. As opposed to the 'strong ties' which bind groups together, the much more extended range of 'friends of friends' may be particularly important on some matters. (Network analysis incorporates nodes connected by strong ties, too, but is particularly effective in picking up the looser and lighter web of more extended linkages.) In several studies of how people obtain services (e.g. an abortionist, a job) it has been found that weak ties have been more effective than strong ties. This is because only a limited stock of information circulates within a closed group, whereas the surveillance range of a whole slew of weak ties is far wider. Thus, more widely-flung contacts are likely to hold a much greater stock of information, even if this web of weak ties is not very systematic or efficient in passing that information on.

Another key idea is that of indirect 'connectivity'. Formally separated social units may in fact be coordinated or controlled behind the scenes by a web of interconnections. Indeed, analysts of the economic power elite which is considered to run the business world have developed a variety of models of how interconnectedness is achieved behind the backs of

markets which are apparently populated by a host of independent businesses. It has been shown that there are:

- controlling effects of an upper class operating through policy think-tanks and foundations;
- controlling effects of major property-owning families through family trusts;
- controlling effects through major banks which can be at the centre of groupings of companies; and
- controlling effects through business empires built up by acquisition as much as merger.

Such links can be measured and their patterns modelled.

Another important idea is that of 'structural balance'. From examining triads of relations among three people (or nodes) it can be readily seen that some triads are balanced whereas others are unbalanced. For example, if A is dominant over B and B dominant over C, the triad is balanced, if then A is dominant over C. Indeed, one might expect this to occur naturally anyway, although empirically there are exceptions which are unbalanced. This type of analysis is interesting in providing predictions about the longer-term stability of groups, based on the characteristics of their constituent triads.

'Structural holes' (Burt 1992) are the gaps in a network pattern, and they provide entrepreneurial opportunities for those in the existing pattern to move into to exploit. This is part of a sociological contribution to understanding the links between firms in markets, although such structural holes can occur in a wide variety of social structures.

3.5 Groups/Organisations

Formally-organised collective entities are a central component in our social experience.

> Our society is an organisational society. We are born in organisations, educated by organisations, and most of us spend much of our lives working for organisations. We spend much of our leisure time paying, playing and praying in organisations. Most of us will die in an organisation, and when the time comes for burial, the largest organisation of them all -the State- must grant official permission (Etzioni 1964: ix).

The original impetus for the analysis of organisations emanated from Max Weber's (1947) World War 1 analysis. A major push for the recognition of collectivities has come from James Coleman. who has argued (1990) that there are two types of 'persons': natural and corporate. Corporate entities are further classified into primordial (e.g. the family) and constructed (e.g. corporations). Whereas primordial entities are composed of fixed positions occupied by unique persons, who are not interchangeable, the modern forms are a structure of positions which can be changed and in which the occupants can be changed. The key change is that the modern organisation is a legal entity, which can act on its own, distinct from its members. This social invention allows for innovations to be much more readily adopted.

But this flexibility is a two-edged sword. On the one hand, the often oppressive primordial structures are broken up and people are allowed more freedom, since they are now socially controlled only in respect of each of their various roles rather than their fixed family-kinship position. On the other hand, since so many natural persons are employed by

collective organisations, their purposes in life are bent to the wishes of these structures. The intense web of face-to-face social linkages that formerly pertained is now reduced, and subject to severe intrusion from collective persons: e.g. schools, advertisers. The relation between collective entities and natural persons is asymmetrical. Organisations are obtrusive and intrusive, and difficult to gain information about or to control. Perhaps the final irony is, that to obtain some leverage over corporations, natural people may resort to agencies such as the state or to trade unions: but these too can be very distant from and unresponsive to citizens' or members' wishes.

There has been much discussion across many areas of sociology about how people loosely aggregated within social categories may become more tightly welded into collectivities or organisations. The classic discussion was that of Marx concerning the revolutionary consciousness of the working class. To enable collective revolutionary action, the working class requires:

- to widely share immiseration;
- to have punctured the dominant ideology which cloaks the reality of their situation;
- to have begun to replace this with a working class ideology; and
- to build up some organisational capacity (e.g. through trade unions).

Merton's views are more general (Crothers 1987: 97, Merton 1968). He distinguishes between categories, collectivities and groups. Members of categories share statuses, and thereby similar interests and values although not necessarily through shared interaction or a common and distinctive body of norms. Collectivities share norms and have a sense of solidarity, while members of groups interact with each other and share a common identity, which is also attributed to them by others. But he does not then go on to provide sociological explanation of how groupings might move up (or for that matter down) this hierarchy of levels.

Each organisation is in some part unique, but also shares similarities in its attributes with other organisations. They interact with other organisations and can bunch together to form further, higher-level (meta-) organisations. They persist, they change, they are born, they die. However, the metaphor does not carry over exactly, as unlike people, organisations can have major bits break off, or be added to, and can interact with people as well as other collectivities. A further, and central, discontinuity with this individualistic analogy is that organisations tend to be multi-layered. Any organisation can be a veritable 'Russian doll' of nested sub-organisations, and there can also be layers of people who are affected beyond the usual organisational boundaries. Social patterns can also crosscut the layers and boundaries of organisations.

> In analysing an organisation, the major independent variables are the formal institutions in terms of which social conduct is organised: the division of labour, the hierarchy of offices, control and sanctioning mechanisms, production methods, official rules and regulations, personnel practises and so on. The major dependent variables are the results accomplished by operations and the attachment of its members to the organisation, as indicated by productive efficiency, changes effected in the community (say, a decline in crime rates), turnover, satisfaction with work, and various other effect criteria. To explain the relationship between these two sets of abstract variables, it is necessary to investigate the processes of social interaction and the interpersonal relations and group structures (Blau cited in Calhoun 1990:17).

Sociologists of organisations have also developed a distinct vocabulary which identifies several further major features of organisations. They are seen as having goals, an internal structure, technology and resources, and a surrounding environment. In pursuit of their goals, they deploy their material and human resources to suit the key features of their technology and organisational framework in order to produce whatever goods and services is their purpose.

Many organisational analysts cleave to a view of organisations as being organised more-or-less rationally: that their goals are provide clear guidance, that decisions are rationally made within the parameters set by the goals, and that the organisation is rationally organised in terms of its means for reaching these goals. This concern of organisations with rationality contrasts strongly with the considerable inefficiency of most other types of social entity. It provides a basis for expecting clearer patterns of similarity amongst organisations.

It has been found that organisations, far from being quite static in their pattern, have changed their practises of management over time. As a result, much of the recent effort in organisational studies has gone into the tracking of changes in organisational form.

3.6 Institutional areas/Fields

An important sociological conception is the image that societies are composed of assemblages of institutions, often arrayed within particular institutional areas (e.g. family, economy, religion etc). In this vision, it is readily seen that the 'content' of each social area differs from that of others, and that this content is particularly relevant to its analysis. Particular central values and norms are seen as flavouring the working of each institutional area. It may also be that particular institutional areas are characterised by particular structural configurations: their environment gives the social forms in a particular area some unique features.

In older sociologies, sometimes a 'billiard-ball' model of societies was used: societies were seen as a set of institutions - the economy, polity, religion, etc - and the relations between each were plotted (e.g. Weber is depicted as exploring the relations between religion and the economy in particular societies).

Bourdieu's image of a field is useful to map an institutional area. He sees the economy, polity etc in modern societies as fields with their own internal logic of development and relative autonomy, although he is also concerned with their interrelations. Each field has its own values and goals, and there is struggle amongst those in the field (employing whatever types of 'capital' they have command over and which have legitimacy in that field) for the right to set the standards, and to exercise power, in that field. In addition, Bourdieu sees linkages between institutional fields, and that fields have their own tendency to both reflect wider society and also to shuck off any too close overlaps from other institutional areas. His approach also allows investigation of the extent to which, in any social formation, there have developed separate fields: it is not assumed that there is any particular menu of institutional areas. However, the mix of available types of capital in a society may structure the range of fields which have a separate existence.

Fields also differ in terms of their organisational arrangements: whereas the formal economy is organised into firms, together with central coordinating institutions such as the stock

market, the family/ household sector of society merely consists of endless numbers of small units with only the most occasional formal organisation claiming to represent the interests of some particular fraction of households.

Other conceptions which are used to understand environing 'fields' include studies of inter-organisational relations and of markets. Inter-organisational relations has become a subject-area in its own right. Many of these studies show how alliances of organisations can be mobilised to work together to shape broad areas of policy development or market operation. For example, the oil industry in USA organised to squash possible governmental flight regulations that would have then exposed commercially secret data on the paths of exploration flights. Another example concerns agricultural workers, stuck with low wage rates, who were able to mobilise their affiliates to put pressure on the networks of the employing super-company, which then eventually raised the wages. Much activity in social formations involves complex, shifting and often fragile relations amongst blocs of organisations.

Another key metaphor is that of the market. A market is a particular type of inter-organisational framework which provides a mechanism through which the operations of the various units can be co-ordinated. This ideal-type model can also be held up against at least partially similar structural alternatives to examine differences in their mode of operation: e.g. command economies. A classic market is supposedly one where there is a range of different units of somewhat similar size, where each has little effect on other units and where there is a good flow of information.

Although the internal organisation of an institutional area may take the structure of being a market, this form is **particularly** appropriate only to the description of economies. Other institutional areas tend to have rather different internal arrangements. Another institutional environment which differs from economic markets is that centred on the government. This sector involves the ordinary public as 'citizens' rather than 'customers' and marches to the beat of rather different requirements. Of recent years, however, new right ideologists have increasingly attempted to subvert these differences and to remake the state sector along the lines of straight capitalism. As well as being an important area of society, a state can be a significant set of organisations leading many other areas of social activity. One important role the State often plays is in rule-setting and enforcement of these rules in the markets which the various other social units are, in turn, embedded within.

Beyond the economy and polity lie other sectors. A third sector is the voluntary and non-profit one, which operates according to yet a further set of rules, but which is also under siege from both governmental and especially capitalist modes of operation. The current 'mixed' operation of some voluntary sub-sectors has been described as a 'quasi-market'. Another institutional area is focused on the family and household operation within communities. There are a wide variety of other institutional areas which might also deserve separate attention.

A useful distinction to invoke at this point is that contrasting 'public' and 'private' spheres. The working of some institutional areas are held to be the concern of many groups (although some are disenfranchised) and there is public discussion about them. But, in other spheres, they are not held to warrant much attention and discussion is suppressed or deflected into private nooks and crannies. In modern Western societies it has been held

traditionally that only men have a voice in 'public spheres' (such as the economy and polity) whereas those spheres in which women's concerns are considered to be dominant warrant little attention. This is slowly changing.

3.7 Societies and cultures

Another very important social unit is something of a shadow standing behind the nation-state (and the national economy) and is often assumed by social analysts to be the most appropriate context for their analyses. Many sociologists have made a particular point of privileging 'societies' as in many historical periods and regions they have been a dominant level of social organisation. Smaller societies are often highly cohesive 'tribes' with sharply demarcated social boundaries and in 'modern times' of the last few centuries (during which sociology was formed) the nation-state was increasingly hegemonic in its sway. Societies (especially those where a state is their leading component) are often considered to focus on social cohesion and personal identities and on the relations with other societies. (However, this is a characteristic of all social well-functioning social structures, albeit accentuated at the societal level.) One empirical test of the functioning of a society is whether or not it would be resilient if major components were destroyed (e.g. in war or natural disaster). Modern large-scale societies are particularly integrated through their political and related processes and through extensions such as welfare states or police states intrude into everyday social life.

3.8 Civilisations and world systems

Over a couple of decades now, Immanuel Wallerstein has built a 'world-systems' framework which shows that under some historical conditions societies are embedded within wider structures. This approach has strong Marxist influences, but has also been strongly influenced by the Annales school of French social historians. The world-systems approach argues that the internal unity and significance of nation-states has been considerably exaggerated. Rather, since the sixteenth century at least, the various European (and later other) nations have been embedded within a wider and expanding world-system which has been girded by flows of trade, capital, culture and people. The possibilities open to particular countries, regions or even individual enterprises are very considerably (often quite overwhelmingly) shaped by their position in relation to the world-system. These positions are discussed in terms of three or four main zones:

- the metropolitan core;
- the semi-periphery;
- the periphery; and
- unincorporated ('indigenous peoples') areas.

The metropolitan core is at the centre of the system and ensures that the system is organised for it to obtain the best value. The core has been traditionally involved with manufacture and service provision and is politically and militarily powerful. The world system is not, however, laced together by political mechanisms, although there may be significant coordinating arrangements (e.g. the OECD) and often there is a 'hegemonic' state amongst those states in the core countries, which then becomes the 'leader of the orchestra' (for example, the role played over many decades by the USA). Instead, the power of the core over the rest of the world-system is wielded, rather more cheaply in terms of the resources

required, mainly by economic means. Empires are much more expensive because more direct state coordination is required.

The semi-periphery mediates between core and periphery, both exploiting the periphery, but also being exploited by the core. Semi-periphery countries may also be vulnerable to being pushed and pulled by the rather different sets of forces affecting them from both core and from periphery. As a result, some of their institutions may be quite volatile. Some of the spaces in the semi-periphery are occupied by countries or regions which are mobile upwards or downwards in the hierarchy.

Finally, the periphery is the rim of countries whose unprocessed resources are extracted by the core and who serve as the relatively powerless markets for core products.

3.9 Social identities

A major part of the identity or self of any individual is their involvement with various social groupings and how they subjectively construct that relationship (a recent sophisticated discussion is in Archer, 2007). Different processes of identity formation take place under different social conditions. In many societies, social identities are closely circumscribed and based on inherited characteristics, whereas contemporary societies often allow a huge array of choice. Identities variously involve roles or more diffuse groupings at any one often various scales and can be highly complex and multi-dimensional. A pervasive conceptualisation of social identities is the way people prioritise in a hierarchy their various identities and the way they relate these together. Identities are also forged thorough the distancing of people from groups they are not members of. Identities are often forged in cementing the boundaries between groups. But it is important, too, to assay the meanings held by individuals of their involvements in various social groupings. Components of identities have different saliencies and different consequences for commitment or even action. In addition to social contexts, various psychological and other mechanisms are important in constructing, maintaining and changing social identities. Moreover, social identities are open to change over time, and in some cases social identities can change very rapidly over time.

4. Social processes

The social processes requiring separate treatment include:

- social construction (setting up the boxes);
- peopling (filling the boxes);
- resourcing (producing from the boxes);
- social maintenance (maintaining the boxes)
- social change (changing the boxes); and
- life-courses (moving through and around the boxes).

4.1 Social construction processes (Constructing the boxes)

Social structures are almost never built anew from the ground up. On the other hand, nor can they readily be seen as fragile frameworks that are freshly reconstructed each day. It is more reasonable to take an intermediate position to draw attention to those social processes

of social construction which provide the more or less stable frameworks that shape everyday social life, and which also legitimate and bolster it. The main framework around which social structures are built is cultural: it is the set of 'constitutional' ideas held about how that social structure is to be put together. This cognitive and moral framework then provides the boundaries and sets the terms within which the social structure actually works. But this point does not imply that this shared cultural framework is necessarily the most important component in how the social structure works.

A general framework was sketched by Berger and Luckmann (1966) which provides some general guidance. More detailed, and empirically-related, material relevant to the processes of structure-building can be cobbled together from several diverse sources such as:

- studies of the sources of organisational arrangements from a 'radical' economic sociology viewpoint concerned to repudiate the more common argument that organisational structure is determined by 'technological imperatives';
- studies, from a Bourdieu-ian approach, of the social construction of a new social category;
- Tilly's concept of a 'contention repertoire';
- insights gleaned from the application of symbolic interactionist, and social representational, approaches to macro-sociological issues.

Tilly has developed the study of 'repertoires of contention' as part of fine-grained research into social movements accompanying long-term trends in modernising societies. He is interested in showing how the possibilities for action in any group are shaped by the range of possibilities that they consider are available to them.

> Any group who has a common interest in collective action also acquires a shared repertoire of routines among which it makes a choice when the occasion for pursuing an interest or a grievance arises. The metaphor calls attention to the limited number of performances available to any particular group at a given time, to the learned character of these performances, to the possibility of innovation and improvisation within the limits set by the existing means, to the likelihood not only the actors but also the objects of their action are aware of the character of the drama that is unfolding, and, finally to the element of collective choice that enters into the events which outsiders call riots, distortions, disturbances and protests (1981:161).

While Tilly has developed this conception in relation to the framing of public protests, my point is that this approach can be used far more widely. In all areas of society, social structures are constrained by the culturally-available imagination of its members. We live in those social structures we can imagine. For example, Benedict Anderson has argued this most decisively in relation to the rise of different conceptions of the nation-state (Anderson 2006/1983).

Several other points have been adduced by those studying social structure from social interactionist or culturological perspectives. In these approaches, attention is directed towards the ideologies which shape people's understandings of their social environment, the symbols which are the vehicles of these meanings and the rituals which act these out, while mobilising supporting sentiments. One significant programme has organised around the concept of the 'negotiated order'. This approach recognises that social life is governed by shared meanings, but emphasises the complex and fragile way in which such shared meanings are put together. It is clear that most social structures are wreathed in layers of

symbolism and studying this is vital to understanding how the social structure operates. These conceptual frameworks are in part constitutive of social structures through the cognitive infrastructure they lay down, and in addition they are highly significant in providing legitimation.

4.2 Peopling processes (Filling the boxes)

Once (as it were) the empty places in social structures are set up, they can be filled with people. Further processes deal with how the people that are recruited for positions are then handled in that position: their sustenance, promotion and disposal! In turn, the types of people who come to occupy a social structure can, by virtue of their own characteristics, have social consequences, since they may well endeavour to shape the structure 'in their own image'. It should surprise no-one that social structures are very often designed (not necessarily at all consciously) with a particular social category very much in mind.

Much interest in peopling centres on how people are recruited into positions. The most basic distinction is between recruitment on inscriptive criteria and recruitment on achievement criteria. In ascription frames, recruitment is fixed by pre-set biological or kinship characteristics, whereas in achievement frames, wider bases of selection criteria are possible. Especially for paid-work positions, recruitment is largely structured on a social class basis, albeit mediated by the effect of schooling and educational credentials. Gender, ethnic and other effects are also strong. Bourdieu has pointed out that this social class basis for recruitment involves the cultural capital obtained from people's home environments, reinforced by the way schooling (largely captured by middle-class intellectuals) is organised to in fact amplify the effects of class-based cultural capitals. The very style and ambience of education institutions operate to reinforce these processes.

Attention also needs to be addressed to the mechanisms through which people may come to hear of jobs to apply for. In his classic network study, Granovetter (1995/1973) was able to show that, for many, the information which yielded a job offer came from relatively remote and chance linkages. After all, the information scanning range of close contacts is more likely to be narrow and overlap with the information horizon of the job-seeker themselves, whereas the far-flung nature of the network immensely broadens its scanning range.

Once people are in place they may be motivated, instructed, cooled-out, monitored, supervised, sanctioned, rewarded and perhaps placed within a promotional ladder or other schemes for handling their progress.

Once places have been filled with people, the compositional pattern resulting can have its own effects. For example, in various community studies, the question has been posed about the extent to which a locality affects the people living within it. One major influence is clearly the effect of the physical and spatial environment and another is the particular history of the area. However, an important point is that, beyond these obvious comparisons, many of the differences between communities arise precisely out of the mix they contain of different social categories of people. A community of middle class people is likely to operate in quite a different way than one composed of working-class people; a retirement community will be different than a 'nappy valley' of young newly marrieds. Compositional features of a community can have quite a direct effect in their own right. Of course, this point applies to social structures other than communities as well.

Peter Blau (e.g. 1975 see also Calhoun et al 1990) has developed an ambitious theory of the effects of social compositions deploying a 'primitive theory' of macro-structure. This provides a more clear specification of Durkheim's concerns about the consequences of division of labour for the pattern of social integration. However, for Blau, the 'division of labour' involves the considerably wider conception of the composition of the pre-given social structure, and any interest in the overall level of social integration is deflected into the narrower issue of the patterns of social interaction between the groups comprising that social structure.

The key to his theory is that any social structure has 'structural parameters' which are built up from the characteristics of aggregates of its members. These then form aggregate-level opportunity-structures which in turn may constrain or provide opportunities for individual behaviour, especially behaviour which involves interaction across (or within) the social boundaries indicated by these parameters. An obvious example is that one finds it hard to meet an Eskimo in a town without Eskimos: or rather more realistically, that one's chances of meeting an Eskimo tend to be shaped by the proportion of Eskimos in your place of residence.

Much of the flow of people into the slots provided by social structures is controlled by those who set them up or run them in the first place. On the other hand, those who come to fill them adapt various long term strategies and short term tactics in the way they 'use' their position. It is in the peopling of social structures where much of the interplay between ordinary people and controllers of structures takes place.

4.3 Resource processing (Producing from the boxes)

Social positions and the units within which they are embedded are assigned tasks to do, and accordingly are allocated resources to carry out these tasks. They also are involved, as Marx would remind us, in actually producing resources (e.g. commodities). Also, as a surge of more recent research interest indicates, they are also involved in consumption. Yet, it is strange how the pages of the literature of sociology seem often inhabited by quite vacuous social structures, which do little and have little to do it with.

What can be used as a resource is defined by the culture concerned. Different cultures may have considerably different conceptions of the use of the same array of potential resources. For example, oil is central to the running of modern capitalist societies, and yet may have been regarded as merely a curious seepage by other cultures. Groupings within a social structure may vary in their discernment of alternative uses for resources.

Resources, as such, are therefore often regarded as falling outside social structure. They are 'things' used by the social structure. In the first place, resources are the immediately useable aspects of the environment the social structure sits within, especially the natural environment. (The more diffuse aspects of the natural environment, then, presumably provide more general assistance, for example in providing a physical stage.) In addition, people can be beset by any of a catalogue of dangers or risks, 'anti-resources' such as wind, fire, storm, earthquake. The hard physicality of some resources may have a quite direct affect on social behaviour.

However, **physical** resources are but one form of a wider class. In addition, social structures create 'social' resources, as a product of the activities of their members. Giddens has

identified 'authoritative resources' as those which offer power levers over other people. Bourdieu extends this yet further with the term 'cultural capital', and the even wider conception of 'social capital'. He draws useful distinctions between such aspects of 'capital' as the extent to which they can be institutionalised and to what extent they can be appropriated by individuals (e.g. with educational capital in the form of credentials). Philosopher Karl Popper referred to the whole cultural heritage which people build and then live in as 'World 3', with its own (albeit constructed) autonomous reality.

Economists have developed some distinctions about different types of resources. As opposed to the usual commodity of capitalism which is a 'private good', other resources are described as 'public goods'. These differ from private goods in terms of whether the use of a good exhausts it, and/or whether access to the benefits of the good can be kept private. Sunsets, for example, are clearly a public good, although access to a gorgeous uninterrupted view of them (accompanied by champagne on a warm unpolluted beach!) may not be. There are many intermediate categories, especially where goods have 'externalities': where their use by one person has effects on other people. That goods have beneficial externalities, which people can enjoy but cannot be readily charged for, allows 'free-riders' to benefit. In fact, very few goods are 'purely' private, perhaps just household retail items such as bread and butter. Another distinction which can be important for distinguishing between different types of resource is whether or not they are renewable (e.g. hydro-electric power) or non-renewable (eg coal-generated electricity), to give examples relating to physical resources.

These distinctions have important implications relating to the operation of markets, as well as the social groupings in these markets. Classic markets work best with pure private goods, and progressively are less and less able to handle goods with more 'public' characteristics. Public goods are more likely to be handled through non-market mechanisms such as rationing or direct state control. Sometimes, as in contemporary welfare state reform , attempts are made to set up 'quasi-markets' in which coupons or other money-substitutes are artificially provided to enable the good to be allocated other than on a rationing basis. In a market society, public goods are usually not handled very well, and this is likely to lead to 'private wealth but public squalor' (in Galbraith's evocative phrase).

How are resources allocated and acquired? In some part, resources are allocated 'rationally' (in the eyes of the authorities distributing the resources) to enable people in particular positions to carry out those tasks. This type of bland assertion, though, suppresses the often vigorous processes of competition and conflict between and within social units. Within any firm there will be struggles between different departments for more resources, although there may be quite different types of resource which are struggled over. For example, a common conflict is between a marketing or sales department which wishes to serve the interests of the firm's customers, and the production side which is sensitive to the internal limitations of the production technology. In markets, firms compete for market share. And similarly, nations compete to keep up their standards of living and their ability to beat the goods produced in other nations in terms of price or standard.

Similarly, the distribution of resources (once they have been rendered ready for use) as rewards is also seen as rational in the eyes of the authorities responsible for their distribution. Certainly, ideological justifications to legitimate income distributions argue this. But as with the pattern of resource allocation, the pattern of reward allocation is the

contemporary outcome of contemporaneous and historical struggles amongst various social groupings. Certainly, resources are often distributed along social class lines, and other lines of social cleavage such as gender and ethnicity are important. A host of empirical studies have been carried out on income distribution. To a considerable extent the rewards are related to the earning-capacity of individuals, which comes from those of their characteristics which are valued on the job-market. But in addition, sociologists have pointed out that much is shaped by the opportunity structures which they face, which they may be influence barely at all.

The Mertonian concept of 'opportunity-structure' is a general-purpose framework often deployed by sociologists to indicate the ways in which groups differ in terms of their legitimate access to resources. For example, Merton argued that deviance was particularly generated in those groups where, despite a shared cultural pressure to do well, these groups lacked the ready access to achieve occupational or financial success. Such a propensity might be further reinforced when people in this position had access to an 'illegitimate' opportunity-structure in which the means of deviance was available to them.

4.4 Social reproduction/Maintenance processes (Keeping the boxes operational)

Social structures take energy to keep going, even if they sometimes appear to have massive solidity. If there is a lapse in the supply of involvements social structures can quickly crumble (as perhaps the examples of the great South American civilisations shows.) Experimentation with small groups has suggested that some social structures require both task and cohesive leadership and activities and it is likely that their [pertains across many larger social structures too. Social reproduction also requires many 'behind the scenes' day to day activities to run the structure.

4.5 Organised social change/Transformation processes (Changing the boxes)

Too much can be made of the distinction between the normal ebb and flow of the day- by-day social process, and more definitely intended changes in arrangements. Often the distinction is quite arbitrary, and in general change is best seen as lying on a continuum between normality and radical discontinuity. After all: plus ca change, plus ca reste la meme chose. On the other hand, there are social processes which directly and consciously involve the reshaping - or the attempted reshaping, or indeed defence - of existing structural arrangements. In order not to slight such processes, separate attention is needed.

Early theories of social change and revolution often focused on the collective behaviour of riots and disorderly assemblies which are often the human face of turbulent social change. Much (often essentially conservative) social commentary on these collective events stressed their irrational, sentiment-laden, 'mob psychology' nature, and the regression into animal-like and imitative behaviour of those involved.

The array of social movements of the 1960s precipitated a much closer look at the mechanics of social change. The civil rights, women's, environmental, peace, gay/lesbian and other social movements were all struggling for success under the bright lights of media publicity. Reflection on the comparative successes and failures of these movements seemed a fertile ground for developing sociology of social movements. More recent writing in these areas has sometimes noted the links in their ideas to the enunciated strategy and tactics for

fostering social change advocated by social change activists and theorists such as Lenin, Trotsky, Mao and Alinsky. (This is part of a two-way trade in ideas between the lay world and analysts.)

A broad approach labelled 'resource mobilisation theory' (RMT) developed. One stream of this approach works at a social psychological level, making the assumption that in fact involvement in social change is rational, and attempting to explain people's involvement in terms of their incentives and costs (as in the broader REM model). At the membership level, the role of social network links in recruiting people and ensuring their continued participation is seen as crucial.

The other stream of RMT works at an organisational level, rather more as seen from the viewpoint of a social movement leader. It therefore is concerned with resources, recruitment, strategies and tactics, ideology and communication, not to forget organisational arrangements. In this approach, a distinction is made between the 'Social Movement Organisation' (SMO) or organisations in the vanguard of the conflict, and the long tail of the more or less almost-passive support which good causes often receive: or evil ones for that matter. It is not enough, of course, to concentrate on just the social movement itself, and the wider social environment, competitors and counter-movements have also to be taken into account. In addition, the needs of the organisation itself, just to maintain itself as an organisation, can begin to cut into, or even deflect, the drive for change.

Resource mobilisation theory can be seen as a broad framework within which historical understandings about social movements can be accumulated and particular theories about social movements can be tested. In more specificity, these analysts have argued that:

a. movement actions are rational, adaptive responses to the costs and rewards of different lines of action;
b. the basic goals of movements are defined by conflicts of interest built into institutionalised power relations;
c. the grievances generated by such conflicts are sufficiently ubiquitous that the formation and mobilisation of movements depends on changes in resources, group organisation, and opportunities for collective action;
d. centralised, formally structured movement organisations are more typical of model social movements and more effective at mobilising resources and mounting sustained challenges than decentralised, informal movement structures; and
e. the success of movements is largely determined by strategic factors and political processes in which they become enmeshed.

'New Social Movement' (NSM) theory, has arisen to partly complement and partly challenge the RM approach. The NSM theorists are much more concerned with the societal framework within which social change movements are launched, and in particular about the cultural and ideological messages they carry. A distinction is drawn between the older social movements for change, which are seen as strongly class-linked, and newer social movements which are seen as reflecting rather different sectional interests.

The more recent peace, environmental etc movements are seen to reflect a different set of values about society than those held in the mainstream of that society. This in turn, can lead to new organisational forms being adopted by them which better reflect these values. This

new ideology tends to de-emphasise the material wealth concerns of the older agenda in contrast to 'quality of life' concerns, such as those relating to the physical environment. NSMs also tend to be egalitarian in terms of their political philosophy, stressing widespread political participation. Thus, NSMs confront various of the central values and structural arrangements of modern societies: materialism, traditional moral values, as well as class, patriarchy and racism. The very diffuseness of their social background can in turn lead to a marked fluidity of membership involvement (since involvement is not sanctioned by any social solidarity). NSMs are likely to be quite media-conscious and can use the media to appeal directly to supporters without building up large organisational support. Protest activities may be carefully staged, and indeed, they may have to be as they cannot deliver a solid steady block of voting support that is needed for involvement in traditional politics.

The NSM approach focuses on different aspects of social movements, but does not necessarily require a totally new sociological approach. It can be seen to blend in with the older resource mobilisation approach. In turn, both approaches can be seen to draw on a variety of theoretical models covering organisations, inter-organisational fields, networks, power etc. that are available within the general stocks of theoretical knowledge in sociology.

The sociology of revolution partially overlaps and partially extends the more general study of social change. 'Social revolutions are rapid, basic transformations of a society's state and class structures; and they are accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below' (Skocpol 1979:4). Because of their dramatic nature and their large-scale effects, revolutions must be firmly placed on the agenda of any sociological approach, as they can be seen as providing a crucial empirical test for any general theoretical approach.

But neither the study of social movements nor of revolutions exhausts the range of investigations required into broad processes of change and struggle between social groupings.

4.6 Life courses (Moving through and around the boxes)

The power of a life course perspective comes from showing the extent to which people's present attitudes and behaviour is explained by their past positions in the social structure (or by the line of their trajectory through the social structure).

Some of the methodological difficulties of analysing trajectories are intractable. In principle, at least, one must envisage two time-slices of social structure and then map the linkages between these two:

- the social source or origin;
- the social destination or outcome;
- the social aspects of the social change group (e.g. generation).

In this perspective, the analyses focus on ordered patterns of change, and how these both are:

- based on prior social structure, and
- effect subsequent social structure.

Some of the complexity comes, therefore, from the multiple viewpoints from which social trajectories can be viewed. They may be seen from the perspective of the situation out of

which they arose, the situation which resulted, from the changing situation of those changing, or against the background of those not contemporaneously involved in change.

While many studies of social trajectories emphasise the smooth flow and long-term consistency of social trajectories, other studies focus on discontinuities and the effects of these on life-courses and contemporary situations. Such interruptions include deaths, major injuries or illnesses, mental breakdown, unemployment and other shocks, either to a person themself or to someone close to them. In 'life events' analysis it is assumed that individuals and social units are subject to occasional (perhaps regular and frequent) social shocks and that these contribute stress which is variously coped with.

Life courses also needed to be viewed from the viewpoint of the social structure itself. At any one time, when a social structure is analytically frozen for viewing (as in a single camera shot) it must be remembered that, in fact, that any social structure is composed of various social groups and individuals each with different types of trajectory, different start-points and different destinations. Often the vectors of this past and future movement are not captured by social analyses which concentrate solely on the present. Differentiating between the variety of groupings, each on their different trajectories, may reveal a rather different understanding of social change.

The succession of statuses occurring with sufficient frequency as to be socially patterned will be designated as a status-sequence, as in the case, for example, of the statuses successively occupied by a medical student, intern, resident and independent medical practitioner. In much the same sense, of course, we can observe sequences of role-sets and status-sets (Merton 1968: 424). Such sequences are not only recognised and expected but are often governed by 'socially expected durations' concerning the timing of each phase. An example of this is that of a 'lame duck' politician, after being defeated in the polls but not yet replaced by the victor. One mechanism tying such sequences together is 'anticipatory socialisation' in which people may orientate themselves to views and behaviour associated with subsequent stages.

Major portions of culture are orientated around providing meaning and a social context of social support through involvement in rituals around the time of the various break-points: birth, adolescence, adulthood, marriage, death etc. 'Rites de passage' serve to shore up the uncertainties and risks associated with people's movement between stages.

A range of quite different types of study have been concerned with the patterns of people's movement within the social structure. Perhaps the most arduous producers of basic information about change are the demographers through their cohort analyses of births, deaths, migration, divorce etc of different age-sex groupings. Another important type of study are those which trace inter-generational occupational mobility between parents and sons or daughters (notably Blau and Duncan 1967). This type of study is vital in understanding how open or closed a social formation is to change over time: a 'closed' society sharply reproduces in the children their parent's social position, whereas a more 'open' society allows room for individual talent and other social factors to result in changed social arrangements between generations. This makes the study of occupational mobility of very considerable theoretical interest, although in practise the similarities of findings across divergent contexts seems to reduce the excitement that this type of study seems to promise.

As well as studying the transmission of occupations, studies have examined the socially-structured patterns through which this transmission is shaped, through mediating variables such as schooling, parental household resources, sibling order, military service, first job and so forth. These can be summarised in concepts such as the pattern of 'status-attainment'. In addition, the transmission of a huge range of other values and characteristics between generations is possible.

Studies may look much more closely at the complex twists and turns of sequences of social positions. For example, the work histories or residential histories of people can be immensely varied. Moreover, these are complicated further by the different exposures people have as a result of their age or their differential involvement: as a result the histories of older people are likely to be more varied than those of younger. Sifting through such rich data in order to yield clear-cut patterns is not easy, especially with little in the way of theoretical guidance.

The types of study noted so far are those which tend to emphasise the objective patterns of life-course changes. In addition, some studies emphasise the more qualitative and subjective aspects. One important concept that can be used to guide this type of study is that of a 'moral career' as suggested by Becker (1970). In this approach, analysts are sensitised to the different stages through which people meaningfully commit themselves to a particular role. For example, a marijuana smoker has to learn not just how to smoke, but how to do so in the style to which they are supposed to grow accustomed. A criminal may be so labelled by police or courts, and then may get to accept this label of themselves, which then creates them as a criminal.

A wider application of this approach is that of the 'life history' where aspects of all of the above are combined: together with locating the person within their own wider but changing social contexts. In a life-history, the sequences through which a person has lived is reconstructed, particularly in the subjective terms through which that person sees their own biography.

5. Conclusions

In summary, a 'guiding thread' for carrying out analyses is to see that social structures involve, above all, the ways in which social groupings are involved in (strategies and tactics) drawing on and creating ideologies, resources and contacts to maintain and/or change their position within the broad social order. But their collective abilities to carry out such 'projects' will vary considerably.

In this chapter I have advanced a concept of a multi-dimensional approach to social structure. Several elements have to be assembled to understand the whole, and this chapter has laid out an extensive conceptual toolkit from which appropriate ideas can be drawn to accomplish particular types of analysis. It is hoped that the reader will press the material covered in this book into practise.

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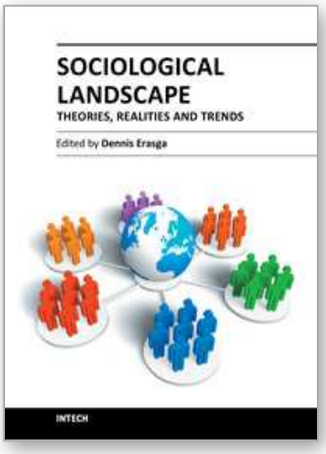

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More than the usual academic textbook, the present volume presents sociology as terrain that one can virtually traverse and experience. Each version of the sociological imagination captured by the chapter essays takes the readers to the realm of the taken-for-granted (such as zoological collections, food, education, entrepreneurship, religious participation, etc.) and the extraordinary (the likes of organizational fraud, climate change, labour relations, multiple modernities, etc.) - altogether presumed to be problematic and yet possible. Using the sociological perspective as the frame of reference, the readers are invited to interrogate the realities and trends which their social worlds relentlessly create for them, allowing them in return, to discover their unique locations in their cultures' social map.

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