

# INTRODUCTORY **SOCIOLOGY**



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## CHAPTER NINE

### SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

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#### Chapter Objectives

After completing this chapter, readers should be able to:

- define social stratification;
- differentiate among social stratification, social mobility and social differentiation;
- highlight various functions of social stratification;
- state various functions of social stratification;
- explain various dimensions of social stratification;
- discuss systems of social stratification; and
- examine sociological explanations of social stratification.

#### Chapter Outline

- Introduction
- Definitions of social stratification
- Differences among key concepts
- Functions of social stratification
- Dimensions of social stratification
- Systems of social stratification
- Theories (or causes) of social stratification
- Summary and conclusion
- Chapter exercises
- References

*‘Unstratified society with real equality of its members, is a myth that has never been realised in the history of mankind’ (Sorokin, 1959)*

#### Introduction

No society is classless or without strata. Stratification is part and parcel of social life. Every society defines a means of categorising each person into a particular social group. The placement of each individual in turn determines his value, as defined by the larger society; hence, the greater role of society in defining every person's value. Differences in values and statuses of individual engender stratification in the society. If social stratification affected only such matters as who gets elected as President or who becomes the Chief Executive Officer, separate chapter might not be dedicated to its discussion. But social stratification does much more: It results in some members of society benefiting greatly and others

suffering. Most societies of the world are organised so that their institutions systematically distribute benefits and burdens unequally among different categories of people (Hughes & Kroehler, 2008). Social arrangements are not neutral, but serve and promote the goals and interests of some people more than those of other people. In this Chapter, we shall discuss the concept of social stratification in terms of definition, functions, dimensions, systems, and theories before assessing it in the Nigerian social context.

### **Social Stratification**

Historically and sociologically speaking, there is no classless society. All societies exhibit some forms of ranking whereby its members are categorised into positions that are higher or lower, superior or inferior, prestigious or insignificant, in relation to each other (Davis & Moore, 1945; Shankar-Rao, 2006). This form of categorisation that operates in a structured system of inequality in which members are ranked based on selected criteria thereby limiting members' access to wealth, power and opportunities is referred to as social stratification. That is, social stratification is a sociological term that applies to the ranking or grading of individuals and groups into hierarchical layers such that inequality exist in the allocation of rewards, privileges and resources. According to Giddens (2001), social stratification simply refers to as structured inequalities between or among different social groupings. It is to be noted that these inequalities are engendered not by mere categorisation of individuals according to their attitudes but by an established system of classifying groups; a complex of social institutions that generate observed inequalities which unequally distribute societal resources (such as income and power) with the most privileged individuals and families enjoying a disproportionate share. Some individuals, by virtue of their roles or group memberships, are advantaged, while others are disadvantaged. If stratification is universally necessary (Davis & Moore, 1945) and disadvantageous to certain groups, then societies must create a democratic structure that allows social mobility – the ease and frequency of moving into a different class, rank, group or hierarchy than that into which one was born – since the fairness of societies is only judged by its level of social mobility (Simandan, 2018).

#### **Social Mobility and Social Stratification**

One of the characteristics of human beings is competition. Aside competing for survival, every human being competes for better life. Human beings always engage in endless endeavours to better their living. In the process, they are sometimes faced with oppositions since resources are limited in supply. Despite likely antagonism (or support) from other humans, they never stop aspiring to change their statuses, and those on top never stop striving to maintain their positions. Since the top is not meant for everyone, any movement of an individual from the lower position to the top might likely force another on top to the bottom of stratification ladder. This up and down movement of people from one status to the other is called social mobility. Simply put, social mobility refers to the shift of individuals and groups from one social status to another (Hughes & Kroehler, 2008; Shankar-Rao, 2006). For instance, the poor may become rich, and vice versa; secondary school teacher may become a university lecturer; a driver may become a commissioner; and a minister may become a beggar.

The movements of individuals up and down stratification ladder are caused by two factors (Hughes & Kroehler, 2008). One, when there is change in the society resulting in the praise

of new positions and demeaning of old ones. For instance, newly introduced Executive President (in the era of democracy) had made traditional rulers to be less recognised. Two, when there is change in the demand for talents and abilities. Although those in the higher strata may decide not to transfer certain skills and abilities, they cannot control the natural distribution of talents. For instance, as a more recent social phenomenon, the economic reward of Comedian or Musician in an occasion may surpass a year salary of a Professor.

Social mobility may be vertical or horizontal. Vertical social mobility refers to movement of individuals or groups from one social status to another of higher or lower rank. Specifically, it involves change in class, occupational prestige or power. For instance, a cleaner becoming a manager. Horizontal mobility is the movement of individuals from one social status to another of approximately equivalent rank. It is a change in social position without a change in social status (Shankar-Rao, 2006). For example, a lecturer in one university may move to another institution to continue his teaching, research and development while maintaining his rank or an administrative officer may be moved from one department to another as a way of internal re arrangement. This movement comes with no change in social status but rather a change in social position.

Social mobility may also be intergenerational or intragenerational (Hughes & Kroehler, 2008). The former is the comparison of one's social status with one's parents' at certain points of career development. It can be assessed by comparing the social status of a person at a particular age with that of her/his parents when they were in that age. The latter (intragenerational social mobility), on the other hand, involves the comparison of one's social status over a protracted period of time. In Nigeria, no or small intragenerational mobility tend to be the norm while large intragenerational mobility rarely occur. Several factors may account for intragenerational mobility and one example is an individual's experience of natural disaster which can make such an individual to be moved down the stratification ladder within a generation such that his latter days become worse than his former.

#### Social Differentiation and Social Stratification

Everything and everyone differs. Since inception, there has been different things, individuals, groups, relationships, and classifications. Certain concepts were created to allow for easy differentiation. (For instance, Adam, the first man according to theologians, was saddled with the responsibility of differentiating among various types of animals through naming.) With time, there arose differentiation by age, sex, and other personal characteristics. The distinctive variation among individuals and groups in terms of age, sex, occupation, religion, and income is what is referred to as *social differentiation* (Shankar-Rao, 2006). Age differentiation is present in all societies as we find age grading such as infancy, childhood, adolescent, adulthood and old age across the globe. Age distributes privileges, rights, duties and responsibilities, and age statuses are ascribed, and not achieved. Thus, one has to attain certain age in order to contest for political position, to vote, to marry, to be sued and be guilty of a crime, to be admitted into a school, to be considered responsible, among many others. Also, sex differentiation is one of the fundamental aspects of human society and it is the most important kind of social differentiation. No society treats their male and female the same way and in no society do male and female perform the same

responsibilities, occupy the same statuses, have the same aspirations, share common interests, conform to the same norms, and think alike. Whichever, it is evident that the biological fact of sexual differentiations has multiple social consequences; hence, some writers spoke of ‘male culture’ and ‘female culture’ to denote their diverse ways of life. While differences in terms of age and sex are considered foundations of specialisation in all societies, occupations also create conditions for variations in responsibilities and statuses. It is important to note that occupation is not only a way of earning money, it is also a demonstration of the style that people live and the level of prestige that people are accorded with. In advanced societies, occupations are related to social status and remain the most used measure of class system of stratification. In these societies, the functional importance of a given occupation to the society where it is rated and the relative scarcity of personnel for the occupation usually determine the prestige of a given occupation. Hence, the physician is associated with higher prestige in many societies because of its functional importance to many societies and the relative scarcity of physicians to meet societies’ needs.

Social differentiation is a concept that describes a process whereby society becomes highly specialised over time. In human history, specialisation became important when there arose the need for division of labour. In fact, both terms, specialisation and division of labour, are twin-concept that is very difficult to separate if at all possible. While the need to perform different functions led to specialisation, specialisation promotes division of labour. Very early in their history, human beings saw the inevitability of dividing functions and labour since such division contributed to greater social efficiency (Hughes & Kroehler, 2008). As a result of people performing varying tasks, they evolved into occupying different statuses. Social differentiation may be necessary for greater social efficiency; such differentiation needs not be ranked in relation to one other. For example, the statues of house-help and gate keeper are differentiated, but one is not obviously superior. They are simply different. Difference here simply means neutral comparison between social categories that are not the same just as daylight is different from darkness (Livesey & Lawson, 2010). Social differentiation is a necessary precondition for social ranking, it does not create the ranking itself. The fact that human beings and social phenomena are different is not, in itself, particularly important; what is important is the social meaning attach to the differences. For instance, the difference between husband and wife becomes socially important when a husband carries out his responsibilities as the head of the family according to the culture of the society and the wife becomes submissive as a result. Here, the two are not just ‘different’; rather, the difference between the two is significant because it is rooted in their relationship. For instance, in term of *inequality*, husband has higher social status than his wife, one that allows him to perform certain actions that his wife is not allowed to carry out (and vice versa). When people begin to think of social differentiation as having different level of social significance (or status) than others, thinking of them in hierarchical terms, then we can start talking about social stratification. Where there is social stratification, there is bound to be social differentiation, but the reverse is not true (Hughes & Kroehler, 2008). It is the ranking of social differentiation that engenders social stratification.

### **Functions of Stratification**

Observation of the social world reveals that all societies across the globe are stratified. The universality of this stratification is made possible as a result of its functional necessity. The

key functional necessity of stratification is the requirement faced by society of placing and motivating individuals in the social structure (Davis & Moore, 1945). Aside the social classes that social stratification creates therefore, it also performs key functions for societal integration, continuity and development. According to Davis and Moore (1945), Johnson (2013), Ritzer (2011), and Shankar-Rao (2006), some of the functional necessity of stratification are explained thus:

1. **Social stratification determines individual placement:** With the help of social stratification, individuals are placed into various positions or statuses in the social structure. Every position is functionally necessary for societal survival (Davis & Moore, 1945). While some are pleasant, others are not, and while some are more prestigious, others are not. Therefore, since all individuals cannot be found in prestigious positions for instance, every individual would strive to occupy the positions they desire while considering the rewards the society has to offer for those positions. Hence, encouraging competition and hard-work.
2. **Social stratification encourages competition and hard-work:** Social stratification encourages members of society to aspire for the top position; average human beings do not aspire to be at the bottom (although some may choose to be there). Social stratification therefore induced individuals to live up to societal expectations. Those who best fit for these expectations (through competition and hard-work) are rewarded immensely for their efforts. It is established that high ranking positions are those that are less pleasant, more important, and with scarce personnel (Davis & Moore, 1945). Those who sacrifice to attain these high ranking positions (since they require prolonged training, for instance) are then rewarded with money, prestige, power, comfort, *et cetera*.
3. **Social stratification regulates human relationships.** Human behaviour in the upper class is different from those in the lower echelon in stratification system. For instance, while a lower class woman may decide to sit on the floor in public place where no chair is available, an upper class woman may choose to remain standing even when required to sit. Role expectations, norms and standards of behaviour are involved in relationships with each stratum. Stratification regulates and controls individual and group behaviours and relationships. Inequality of opportunity gives advantages to those in higher strata and deprives those belonging to the lower strata thus regulating human relationships.
4. **Social stratification performs economic function:** According to Davis and Moore (1945), individuals must be motivated to perform the duties required of their positions. This requires motivation to fill certain positions and to perform the duties attached to them. Since these rewards are unique to each category of positions, it is therefore functionally necessary to give different rewards to various positions so as to encourage individuals (for instance, those in the upper classes) to work at maintaining their positions.
5. **Social stratification serves as social control:** Existence of social classes is functional to every society. Each social class has its own sub-culture which guides and controls the behaviours of members. Certain amount of mutual antagonism between social classes is therefore useful as one social class serves as reference point to another. Thus, different social classes act as a means of social control.

6. **Social stratification engenders different socialisation:** With the existence of social stratification, individuals are born into different social classes which in turn lead to different training and upbringing of members of society. With different socialisation comes different values, norms, and standards of behaviours. Different perspectives of life eventually make individual members of society to seek different occupations. Since every occupation has different values, prestige and importance, well trained and educated individuals (more likely from the upper echelon in the society) will seek occupations that align with their values. Hence, the influence of socialisation on individual occupational selection.
7. **Social stratification performs integrative functions:** Members of one class tend to restrict their intimate association to those they share class with and rarely establish relationship with members of different class. This is not pride or humility, but such relationship flows due to shared values and norms of every social class. This tends to integrate members of same class and perpetuate their peculiar values and interests.

### **Dimensions of Stratification**

German social theorists (such as Karl Marx and Max Weber) first provided us with basic dimensions of social stratification before later theorists (such as Ralf Dahrendorf and Randall Collins) started building upon these dimensions. The dimensions include class, status and party. Marx first introduced class system and identified two prevalent classes (or stratification) in a capitalist society. The upper class according to Karl Max are those who own (or control) resources (or means of production) – those he called the bourgeoisies or the oppressing capitalists. On the lower cadre of the stratification system are those who are ready to sell their labour (the only available resources for them) – those Marx called the proletariats or the oppressed working class. From Marx's perspective, the conflicting interests of these two groups form the basis of stratification in capitalist nations. Marx therefore took a unidimensional view of social stratification from economic standpoint (class or wealth). Weber readily acknowledged the importance of this economic dimension but thought power and prestige also matter. In other words, Weber identified three dimensions of stratification: class (economic wealth), status (prestige) and party (power). Wealth is the total value of an individual or family including income and investments; prestige involves the social respect, admiration and recognition with a particular social status which engenders feelings that we are admired and well thought of by others; and power is the ability to compel others to do what they would not ordinarily like to do.

Marx and Weber's discovery of these dimensions help to understand social ranking in the modern society. While it is possible to stratify society base on the amount of wealth individual commands, such stratification will not provide objective view of the world. It is also possible for an individual to occupy prestigious position without necessarily commanding wealth (such as a professor or clergy). Likewise, some public officials such as policemen may control power without having huge wealth or receiving high prestige. Prostitutes or professional criminals may have economic privilege (wealth) but receive little prestige and may not control power in the political sense that Weber meant it. It is however also likely that an individual (such as a physician) will control all the three dimensions (wealth, power and prestige). These three dimensions of stratification therefore usually go



hand-in-hand, they do not always overlap. For the most parts, the three hang together, feeding into and supporting one another (Kerbo, 2006).

### **Systems of Social Stratification**

Systems of stratification can also be referred to as types of stratification or forms of stratification. Historical sociology has shown the existence of various stratification systems in human history. The varying of these systems are conditioned by the degree of vertical mobility and the rate at which people are permitted to move in and out of a given strata (Kerbo, 2006). In other words, a system of stratification in any given society is largely determined by whether such society operates a closed system or an open system. In a closed system, individual members of society find it very difficult, if not impossible, to change their social status and there seems to be virtually no chance of vertical movement on a stratification ladder. Open system however allows vertical mobility on a stratification ladder and individual members of society can change their social status without much difficulty (Hughes & Kroehler, 2008). These distinctions between closed and open systems are similar to the differences between ascribed statuses and achieved statuses. Whereas ascribed statuses are given or 'ascribed' to people by their group or society, and are typically of closed stratification system; the achieved statuses are available to people based on individual choice and competition, and are common in open system. Although there is no entirely closed or open systems in historical societies of the world, there are elements of having characteristics that are closer to one end. Some of these systems of stratification are hereby briefly discussed.

- **Slave system:** The oldest and most closed stratification system is slavery. Slave system refers to the ownership of people, as against the class system's ownership of people's labour (Ennals, 2007). It involves a situation in which one group or individuals (often known as masters) claim ownership of another group or individuals (called slaves), such that the privileged group or individuals take upon themselves the power to use, command, abuse and possess the fruits of the underprivileged group's or individual's labour (Livesey & Lawson, 2010). In slave system therefore, the slaves are the properties of their masters. In this system, vertical social mobility is exclusively closed and social statuses are determined absolutely by ascription. Children born to slave parents automatically become slaves by virtue of their parents' status. The genesis of slave system was said to have begun about 10,000 years ago, after the development of agricultural societies. In ancient times, most people acquired the status of slaves either through conquest or inability to pay debts. The need for more people on farmland encouraged slavery to thrive through the Middle Ages. Arguably, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries marked the peak of slavery in human history when people were deliberately hunted, captured and shipped as slaves majorly from the continent of Africa to other parts of the world (Thornton, 1998). The global dimension of slavery eroded cultural authenticity; increased inequality; as well as brought about the underdevelopment of Third World countries at the expense of the development of First World countries; among others disadvantages (Oyekola, 2018). Today, slavery still reflects in some parts of Africa, Asia, and South America where people are taken as prisoners of war in ethnic conflicts; where women and girls are captured in wartime or kidnapped from their neighbourhoods for prostitutes and sex slaves; where children are sold by their

parents to become child labourers; and where workers are abused, tortured and too terrified to leave because of debts; among others (Bales, 2007; Batstone, 2007).

- **Estate systems:** Estate systems, also known as feudal systems, are characteristics of pre-modern, pre-industrial, agrarian (agricultural) societies, which were common in the continents of Europe and Asia in the Medieval Era through the 1800s. This system was based on land ownership because farming was the predominant occupation and there were no machines to produce goods. At the upper echelon were the landed gentry or nobilities (those who owned large expanse of land on which serfs laboured) and the lower cadre comprised the serfs (those who typically represent the poor under the arbitrary control of the nobles (Kerbo, 1996). Under feudal systems, to own land was to control power. Land was considered the property of God under the trust of Monarch, being God earthly representative. This was in turn consolidated in the hands of chief tenants or nobles. Estate systems were based on a very strong social structure, as rooted in the belief systems that recognised the supremacy of God, the Almighty. It was believed that God had already established social order and it was not for any mortal man to question such ordering; instead, every man was expected to simply follow divine ordering whether favourable or unfavourable. In the divine ordering, there were different levels with respective different rights and privileges. For example, the serf, although not slaves, were subject to their feudal lords, who had the power to control their behaviours. Since the serf had very little opportunity to change her or his social status, there was restricted social mobility in this system of social stratification. Not until the 1789 French Revolution which violently overturned long existing social order, estate systems thrived in Europe. The Revolution inspired other nations to cry for freedom and equality. As time went on, European estate systems slowly gave way to class systems of stratification. The total abolition of feudal estates however could not be achieved until the Communist took over China in 1949 after decades of socio-political and economic strife (DeFronzo, 2018).
- **Caste systems:** The Hindu caste arrangement, particularly as it operated in India prior to 1900, serves as an example of a caste system. Caste consists of family members who bear common name, who share common descent especially from a mystical ancestor, who profess to follow same hereditary calling and who are regarded by those that are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogenous community (Cooley, 1956; Risley, 1892). Simply put, a strictly hereditary class is referred to as caste. Caste system has majorly existed in India for about 3000 years, where Hindu religion had a very strong influence (Kerbo, 2006; Livesey & Lawson, 2010). Under the traditional Hindu system, castes determined social order as people were ascribed their social status at birth (according to parental caste position) and the possibility of changing such social status in the course of their lives was not there. Consequently, the caste system is described as a closed stratification system because no individual is allowed to move up or down the class structure, with a rare exception. Such rare exception involves breaking caste laws such as marrying outside one's caste and such can result in losing one's caste position. A term called 'out-caste' is used to describe anyone who break caste laws and consequently, such is relegated in the caste hierarchy to the lowest position (called *harijan* or *untouchable*). Because no one was lawfully allowed to marry

outside one's caste, marriage in caste system was therefore considered to be endogamous. Caste system, as operated in India, was further underpinned by two key important religious beliefs: reincarnation and caste mobility. Reincarnation is the belief that everyone that dies is reborn and caste mobility represents the belief that an individual is reborn into another caste hierarchy (lower or higher) depending on how well or poor such individual performed the religious duties associated with her/his previous life's caste position. In traditional Indian society, people's lives (including job and marriage) were determined by their caste membership. After the independence in 1949 however, India's new constitution granted equal rights to all across caste hierarchy. In addition, migration and modern communication has made members of different caste to find themselves in complex network of relationship that has weakened the caste system. Today, caste still shapes behaviour in some localities, especially in rural areas, setting the rules of courtship, diet, housing, and employment, however, not as strong as it was about 3000 years ago (Nanda & Warms, 2002).

- **Class systems:** Class system is a common feature of industrial society because industrialisation itself is a product of individual efforts in a free market resulting in differing individual wealth. By definition, class system is a system of stratification whereby people are classified according to their economic possession. Generally, sociologists use income, wealth, type of occupation, level of education, lifestyle and material possession to categorise people into social classes. Class system was said to begin when individuals started amassing wealth to themselves at the detriment of others thereby creating social inequality. Class system is more flexible and open than other systems of stratification (such as slave, estate and caste systems) because it allows social mobility. This is because class system is based more on achievement than ascription; that is, the status is achieved and not ascribed. Although an individual is born into a given social ranking in class system of stratification, such individual has relatively equal opportunity to move either upward or downward base on her/his personal efforts, knowledge, and skills. While these qualities do not aid any movement in caste or slave societies, they often determine social mobility in class societies. It is important to also note that while individuals born in wealthy and influential families have better access to resources, it does not necessarily mean that such individuals will die in such wealthy and influential families.

### **Sociological Explanations of Social Stratification**

Since its inception, sociology has concerned itself with social order and social dynamics. This reflects in the works of its founding fathers such as Auguste Comte, who sought to find solution to social disorder of his time. More importantly, the system of social stratification that existed in his time accounted for the social revolution experienced in the very late 18th century and early 19th century. As sociology developed, the question of why social stratification and division should feature in human condition provided a central focus of the new science. Through the years, two strikingly divergent perspectives have emerged. The two theories explain why social stratification is universal. On the one hand is functional theory which supports the existing social arrangement, emphasising that differential distribution of rewards are necessary instrument for the societal continuity. Conversely, conflict theory has been highly critical of existing social arrangements, contending that

social stratification is not a necessary condition for societal survival, rather, an exploitative relationship arising from continuous struggle between the 'haves' and the 'have-not'. (Hughes & Kroehler, 2008). Next sections assess these two theories.

### **Functionalism (or functional theory of social stratification)**

Simply put, functional theory of social stratification establishes that social division exists in society because of its benefits to the society. All societies have various parts or structures and these parts function harmoniously and interdependently. A best-known and very popular single piece of work that can easily be identified with functional theory of social stratification is the work of Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore (1945). Davis and Moore (1945), posit that social stratification performs functions that are both universal and necessary. According to them, the need for social stratification in all societies brought it into existence as no society is ever un-stratified (universality); neither as any society found social stratification unimportant (necessity). Specifically, their explanations centres on system of positions, especially how certain positions carry different degrees of prestige; and not to the individuals occupying those positions or how they get into those positions.

It is now the function of every society to device means by which individuals come to fill different positions in the stratification system and once that has been achieved, society has another responsibility to instil in the individuals the need to achieve the demand of those positions. Every society must therefore concern itself with human motivation. This is important because the duties associated with different positions are not all equally pleasant to individual members of society (some positions are more desired to occupy than others), are not all equally important to societal survival (some positions are more significant to societal survival than others), and are not equally in need of the same abilities and talents (some positions require more abilities and talents than others). Davis and Moore (1945), further illustrate their theory using more important social positions. According to them, the high ranking positions are less pleasant or desired to occupy, but more important for the survival of society and requires more special abilities and talents. Consequently, society must device certain reward system which it can use to induce members to occupy certain positions and some ways which it can use to distribute rewards among various positions. For examples, more motivations should be attached to high ranking positions to attract more individuals, and less motivation should be provided for low ranking statuses so as to discourage members from filling such positions (since such positions are already pleasant to fill, less important for societal survival and requires no great abilities and talents). Inequality is therefore the motivational incentives that society has evolved to meet the problems of filling all the positions and of getting the position holders to carry out the associated roles to the best of their capacity. Since these rewards are built into the social system, stratification therefore is an 'unconsciously evolved device' by which societies ensure that the most important positions are conscientiously filled by the most qualified persons (Davis & Moore, 1945; Shankar-Rao, 2006). Functionalist theory of social stratification therefore posits that high ranking positions (such as doctors because it is burdensome and expensive to receive medical training) must be rewarded with high salary, great prestige and enormous power to be certain that people occupy those positions. Otherwise, the positions would remain unfilled, and society would disintegrate. Since its first publication (Davis & Moore, 1945),

functional theory of stratification has received much criticisms (see Huaco, 1966; McLaughlin, 2000; Ritzer, 2011; Tumin, 1953).

### **Economic determinism (or conflict theory of social stratification)**

The notion that social stratification is both functional universal and functional necessary; and that high ranking positions are less pleasant to occupy, more important for social survival and requires great abilities and talents are often difficult to support. This calls for alternative explanations. Conflict theory of social stratification, as an alternative explanation, posits that stratification exists, not because it benefits all individual members of society but because it benefits some individuals and groups who have the privilege and power to dominate, oppress and exploit others. Conflict theory rests heavily on the ideas of Karl Marx, especially his historical economic determinism (Marx, 1983). Marx believes that the capitalist's drive to amass wealth is the foundation of modern class struggle (the continuous struggle between bourgeoisies and proletariats); hence, the origin of social stratification. By surplus value, Marx means the difference between the value that proletariats create as measured by the labour time put into the commodity they produce and the value they received from capitalists as determined by their meagre wages. Social stratification is maintained as long as there are greedy capitalists who can employ their economic intelligence to exploit marginalised workers who only have their labours to sell. Also, social stratification will be abolished when the working class overthrows the capitalist class and establishes a new classless society called socialism (Dahrendorf, 1959; Marx, 1976; Marx & Engels, 1967). In short, both functionalist and conflict theories provide part of the answer, but neither contains the whole truth about the theory of social stratification (see Kerbo, 2006; Lenski, 1966; Milner Jr, 1987; Sorokin, 1959; Van den Berghe, 1963 for synthesis of the theories).

### **Summary and Conclusion**

In this Chapter, efforts have been made to describe social stratification and to differentiate it among other sociological concepts such as social mobility and social differentiation. Various functions, dimensions and systems of stratification were also discussed in this Chapter before sociological explanations of social stratification were provided. The Chapter concludes that social stratification is part and parcel of social life and it is inevitable in any given social system. The possibility of individual movement up and down, or in and out, of a given social status largely depend on the system of stratification in operation. Today, capitalist system (engendering class system of stratification) has dominated global scene and is affecting all facets of lives even in the most remote areas of the world, thereby creating different dimensions of social stratification. Current happenings in the world are simply demonstrations of what we may likely expect in the future. In other words, the current social realities are simply a mirror of more social stratification in the future than ever before. Although global efforts at addressing global inequality are in place, only time will tell whether such efforts will yield any enduring desired fruit.

### **Chapter Exercises**

1. What do you understand by social stratification?
2. How can you differentiate among social stratification, social differentiation and social mobility?

3. What is social mobility and how does it occur?
4. Account for the differences in vertical social mobility across different class societies.
5. Describe the differences between open and closed systems of stratification.
6. How do the functionalist and conflict theories of stratification differ?
7. Discuss inequality in Nigerian society with regard to position, prestige, wealth and income.

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## ABOUT THE BOOK

This book can be described as the first book giving a far-reaching view of the basic and contemporary issues in sociology, put together by outstanding Nigerian scholars. The 34 chapters covered in this book have six themes: Introduction (Sociology: definition, brief history and uses; The scientific status of sociology; Essentials of social thought in historical perspective), Key sociological concepts (Man and his environment; Social institutions; Socialisation; Deviance and social control; Social change; Social stratification; Social network theory; Social groups and organisations; African social structure in the silhouette of globalisation), Social problems (Sociological imagination; Social problem and social work; Principles and administration of social work; Understanding the concept of social movement), Fields of sociology (Fields of sociology; Sociology of globalisation; Sociology of climate change; Understanding Sociology of law in social engineering; Sociology of entrepreneurship; Introduction to the sociology of happiness; Sociology of the aged; Sociology of death, dying and bereavement; Elderly welfare initiatives), Research (Proposal writing and review of literature; Qualitative research; Qualitative data analysis, Quantitative research methods; Choice of appropriate statistical techniques in quantitative research), and Gender (A journey through feminism; Gender and administration; Gender and sexuality; Gender construction on Nigerian social media platforms).

The book is an important contribution to the subject matter of sociology, and it should prove to be the greatest value to students at all levels in social sciences in general and sociology in particular, and all scholars concerned with research methods.



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