

The Measurement of Social - Class Mobility and a Discussion of Some of the Methodological Issues Involved

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Abstract

This paper examines how social-class mobility is measured in two major models of mobility research and discusses some of the main methodological issues stemming from their perceptions of society, their assumptions about the unit of social and class mobility, the nature of agency that the unit of analysis is considered to be performing and the causal significance of this agency in allocating the units to class positions. The paper argues that the underlying assumptions need to be examined empirically and as part of mobility research itself rather than being transferred into mobility research as facts, if research in this field is going to fulfil the task(s) that it aims at performing.

Key words: Class mobility, images of industrial society, measuring social mobility, social mobility, social fluidity

Özet

Bu çalışma hareketlilik arařtırmalarının iki önemli modelinde toplumsal-sınıf hareketliliğinin nasıl ölçüldüğünü incelemekte ve bu modellerin toplum algıları ile toplumsal-sınıf hareketliliğinin analiz birimi, bu analiz biriminin gerçekleřtirdiğİ düşünölen failliğın doğası ve bu failliğın analiz birimlerini sınıf konularına tahsis ve tasnif etmede sahip olduđu nedensel önem hakkındaki kabullerinden kaynaklanan yöntemsel sorunları tartışmaktadır. Çalışma, eğer bu sahadaki arařtırmalar yerine getirmeyi amaçladıkları bilimsel ve toplumsal işlevleri gerçekten yerine getirmek istiyorlarsa kendi önkabullerini peşinen ve olgusal gerçeklermişcesine arařtırma sürecine katmak yerine bunları ampirik ve arařtırma sürecinin bir parçası olarak sorgulamak ve incelemek zorunda olduklarını belirtmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Sınıf hareketliliğİ, sınıai toplum imajları, toplumsal hareketliliğın ölçölmesi, toplumsal hareketlilik, toplumsal akışkanlık

Introduction

Given that research on social mobility provides the key factual information for an empirically grounded critique of competing theories of industrial society, how social-class mobility is conceptualized and measured assumes a pivotal significance in debates on the processes, patterns and consequences of social-class mobility in contemporary societies.

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Social mobility is generally defined as the movement of individuals between different positions within the social division of labour in the larger society. At any given time an individual may occupy one or more of these positions and his/her general standing in society rests on an amalgamation of the amount of material and symbolic power, authority, resources, benefits, advantages and disadvantages that continued occupation of the position(s) enables him/her to enjoy or suffer. There exists, however, as Goldthorpe and Hope point out, a factual distinction between the symbolic and material aspects of all positions within the division of labour. The symbolic aspect refers to relative advantage and power in terms of prestige and rests on 'the ability of an actor to exploit and benefit from *meanings* and *values*', whereas the material aspect refers to 'economic resources, authority, or physical force'. The symbolic aspect yields to the incumbent a certain degree of deference, acceptance or derogation, whereas the material aspect yields opportunities for wealth, income and benefits that can be used to support a particular level of consumption and a distinctive style of life (Goldthorpe and Hope 1974: 5).

The allocation or distribution of individuals to positions within any given division of labour has always been subject to several demographic, social, cultural, religious, political, legal, economic, technological and procedural factors and rules. It is therefore a matter of special empirical inquiry to establish which factors, in which ways and under what historical conditions and circumstances have more or less causal or contingent significance in regulating this process, and what consequences they bring about for individuals, groups and the society in general. The primary objective of research on social mobility is in fact to study and examine the relations between these factors in a given society and to reach generalizable results for certain types of societies. Much of the literature on social mobility has been stimulated by considerations of the direction and consequences of social mobility with regard to political and social stability, class formation, class-based political action for social change and social stratification in contemporary societies. Nevertheless, it should be made clear, as Goldthorpe points out in his examination of the connection between mobility research and social interests, that 'there is no necessary connection between a research interest in mobility and any specific ideological attachment, liberal or otherwise' (Goldthorpe 1987: 2).

Although empirical research on a national scale dates back to Glass' (1954) study of England, research in this field flourished mostly in the 1970s and comprised mainly Australia (1973-74), England and Wales (1972), France (1970), the Federal Republic of Germany (1976-78), Hungary (1973), the Republic of Ireland (1973-74), Northern Ireland (1973-74), Poland (1972), Scotland (1974-75), Sweden (1974), the United States (1973), and Japan (1975). As Ishida (2001) mentions,

mobility studies have in fact been conducted in Japon periodically from 1955 to 1995. In addition, the results of these earlier studies have been examined by various scholars by means of employing new methods and conceptual tools and these re-examinations have fostered renewed interest and further empirical research in the same field. The same efforts have contributed significantly in emancipating social theory from untested assumptions about class mobility and structure in contemporary societies.

The Measurement of Social and Class Mobility

Social mobility is measured by reference to the movement of individuals (or groups of individuals) between given locations of departure and destination in the social division of labour which are conceptualised as class or status locations (see Glass and Hall 1954, Lipset and Bendix 1992, Marshall 1997, Moser and Hall 1954, Goldthorpe 1987, Wright 1997). Therefore, how these locations are conceptualised within and between themselves provides the key for understanding what is referred to by various types of mobility and sets limits to the kinds of people that can actually be covered in mobility research. For instance, when class locations are considered as resulting in essence from a normative-symbolic order of the occupational division of labour, class locations are usually conceptualised as status differences organized in a hierarchical fashion as social strata in which more value is judged to be attached to mental than to menial labour, to leadership and social responsibility than to following others' commands, to self-employment than to being employed by others and to industry than to agriculture. Thus the prime focus in this perspective is not on how and if one class location is causally connected with the other, but on the symbolic value or significance attached to a particular occupational position. Lipset and Bendix's definition of social mobility provides a good example of this kind of conceptualisation:

'The term "social mobility" refers to the process by which individuals move from one position to another in society-positions which by general consent have been given specific hierarchical values. When we study social mobility we analyse the movement of individuals from positions possessing a certain rank to positions either higher or lower in the social system. It is possible to conceive of this process as a distribution of talent and training such that privileges and perquisites accrue to each position in proportion to its difficulty and responsibility. An ideal ratio between the distribution of talents and the distribution of rewards can obviously never occur in society, but the approximation to this ideal, or the failure to approximate it, lends fascination to the study of mobility' (Lipset and Bendix 1992: 1-2).

It is, however, more often the case that a marked discrepancy and a significant difference exist between what is culturally valued and what is materially available. In most cases of research on social and class mobility, empirical categories are deployed basically in two broad frameworks, namely Marxist and Weberian, which take into account material and relational aspects of social class and mobility. Both frameworks share a great deal, in that class locations are considered to be resting on inequalities in the material conditions of life. But they differ about the way in which these inequalities are seen to be brought about and hence lay emphasis on different phenomena in determining and deciding how to allocate individuals and groups to certain locations.

In the Marxist framework, material inequalities are considered to result from the ownership of the means/resources of production. Therefore it is pivotal for any empirical research conducted within a Marxist framework to determine not only the type of property rights over economic resources but also to determine how this relates to the process of economic exploitation. In contrast to this, the Weberian framework considers it necessary to take into account not only the property dimension but also the skills that are marketable (see Weber 1996: 269-70). This in turn requires determining if and how the positions in the occupational division of labour translate into qualitative differences in life chances. Therefore much of the difference between the two frameworks is not about the property dimension of class locations but about the theoretical status of various categories of employees.

The ongoing debates and disputes between these two frameworks have resulted in a general recognition that they are not mutually exclusive and each one can offer certain advantages in promoting sociological understanding of social and class mobility. The most mature examples of how main issues are dealt with by researchers working within Marxist and Weberian frameworks can be found in Wright's *Class Counts* (1997) and Erikson and Goldthorpe's *The Constant Flux* (1992).

Working within a Marxist framework, Wright first distinguishes, by taking into account the centrality of exploitation based on property rights, three basic classes. These are '... *capitalists* (exploiters) who own the means of production and hire workers; *workers* (exploited) who do not own the means of production and sell their labour power to capitalists; and *petty bourgeois* (neither exploiter nor exploited), who own and use the means of production without hiring others' (Wright 1997: 17). For Wright, this basic division does not however provide us '...with an adequate conceptual framework for explaining many of the things we want class to help explain. In particular, if we want class structure to help explain class

consciousness, class formation and class conflict, then we need some way of understanding the class-relevant divisions within the employee population' (Wright 1997: 19). He then divides the employees along two dimensions, namely their relationship to authority within production and their possessions of skills and expertise (Wright 1997: 19). Mapping of these dimensions without gradations produces a basic class typology containing six class locations: capitalists, petty bourgeoisie, expert managers, experts, non-skilled managers and workers (Wright 1997: 24). When gradations in authority and skills, and the number of workers hired are introduced, he obtains twelve class locations: capitalists (employing ten or more people), small employers (employing less than ten people), petty bourgeoisie, expert managers, skilled managers, non-skilled managers, expert supervisors, skilled supervisors, non-skilled supervisors, experts, skilled workers and non-skilled workers (Wright 1997: 25). Regardless of how these gradations are defined, what is obtained in the end is restricted to people in the paid labour force, as Wright himself recognizes (Wright 1997: 26); this means in essence taking into consideration only those people who have a place in the occupational division of labour. However, Wright is careful about making a distinction between individual class location based on job and the mediated class location based on membership in certain groups like households and communities or the relationship to the state. 'Many people, of course, have both direct and mediated class locations. This is of particular importance in developed capitalist economies for households in which both spouses are in the labour force, for this creates the possibility that husbands and wives will have different direct class locations, and thus each of them will have different direct and mediated locations' (Wright 1997: 27).

In contrast, working within a Weberian framework, Goldthorpe's class schema rests on mapping employment status with market capacities. At the first step, the people occupying a position within the occupational division of labour, or simply in paid labour force, are divided into two broad categories of employment status: self-employed and employees. The self-employed group is further divided into three categories according to the number of people they employ: self-employed with 25 or more employees, self-employed with less than 25 employees, and self-employed without employees. The employees are divided into five broad categories: 1) managers (in large establishments, i.e. with 25 or more people, and managers in small establishments, i.e., with less than 25 employees), 2) foremen and supervisors (manual, non-manual), 3) Apprentices, articled pupils and formal trainees, 4) family workers, and 5) employees not elsewhere classified (Goldthorpe and Hope 1974: 22-23). On the basis of these main forms of employment status, occupations are then grouped into occupational categories 'as homogenous as possible in terms of the net

extrinsic and intrinsic material and non-material rewards and deprivations typically associated with the occupations which they comprised' (Goldthorpe and Hope 1974: 24). This procedure yields 124 occupational categories which, when rated in terms of their general desirability, are collapsed into 36 categories mainly according to " 'breaks' in the scale values of the original categories' " (Goldthorpe and Hope 1974: 132, 134-143). What is now referred to as the Goldthorpe class schema is a collapsed version of these Goldthorpe-Hope categories into class categories. As explained by Goldthorpe, this class schema combines 'occupational categories whose members would appear, in the light of the available evidence, to be typically comparable, on the one hand, in terms of their sources and levels of income and other conditions of employment, in their degree of economic security and in their chances of economic advancement; and on the other hand, in their location within the systems of authority and control governing the process of production in which they are engaged'. These classes are as follows (Goldthorpe 1987: 40-42):

Class I: 'All higher-grade professionals, self-employed or salaried; higher-grade administrators and officials in central and local government and in public and private enterprises (including company directors); managers in large industrial establishments; and large proprietors'.

Class II: 'Lower-grade professionals and higher grade technicians; lower-grade administrators and officials; managers in small business and industrial establishments and in services; and supervisors of non-manual employees'.

Class III: 'Routine non-manual-largely clerical-employees in administration and commerce; sales personnel; and other rank-and-file employees in services'.

Class IV: 'Small proprietors, including farmers and smallholders; self-employed artisans; and all other 'own account' workers apart from professionals'.

Class V: 'Lower-grade technicians whose work is to some extent of a manual character; and supervisors of manual workers'.

Class VI: 'Skilled manual wage-workers in all branches of industry, including all who have served apprenticeships and also those who have acquired a relatively high degree of skill through other forms of training'.

Class VII: 'All manual wage-workers in industry in semi-and unskilled grades, and agricultural workers'.

The rationale in analytical terms behind the divisions between various categories of employed population is the nature of employment relationships. Erikson and Goldthorpe distinguish two main types, namely service relationship and labour contract.

'Employment relationships regulated by a labour contract entail relatively short-term and specific exchange of money for effort. Employees supply more-or-less discrete amounts of labour, under the supervision of the employer or the employer's agents, in return for wages which are calculated on a 'piece' or 'time' basis. In contrast, employment relationships within a bureaucratic context include a longer-term and generally more diffuse exchange. Employees render service to their employing organization in return for 'compensation', which takes the form not only of reward for work done, through a salary and various perquisites, but also comprises important prospective elements-for example, salary increments on an established scale, assurances of security both in employment and, through pension right, after retirement, and above all, well-defined career opportunities' (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992: 41).

For Goldthorpe, there is no element in the nature of labour contract which aims at 'securing the relationship between employer and the employee on a long-term basis' although the contract may be renewed or last for very long (Goldthorpe 2000: 216). In a service relation, however, 'the key connection that the contract aims to establish is that between employees' commitment to and effective pursuit of organizational goals and their career success and lifetime material well-being' (Goldthorpe 2000: 220). These employment relationships emerge from the interaction of the specificity of human assets and the difficulty of monitoring the work process. When both the specificity of human assets and difficulty of monitoring are high, employment contracts tend to assume the character of a service relation whereas when both of them are low they tend to assume the character of a labour contract. The same interaction gives rise to mixed forms and thus the employment contract contains elements to achieve both aims. According to these criteria, individuals in Class I and II are classified as pure service class; the individuals in Class VI, lower grade routine non-manual employees in Class III, and all non-skilled manual workers both in agriculture and in other sectors are classified as pure working class; and the high grade routine non-manual workers in Class III and all the workers in Class V are classified as mixed forms (Goldthorpe 2000: 223, Goldthorpe and Heath 1992). What is obtained out of this analytical reallocation of class locations is a main class structure which consists of service class, working class and petty bourgeoisie to cover most of the people in paid employment. The service class also comprises large proprietors as long as they work in their own establishments (Goldthorpe 2000: 240, footnote 14).

Similar to that of Wright, Goldthorpe's class schema excludes people who are not in paid employment and makes a distinction between direct and mediated class locations, although these are expressed differently. For Goldthorpe, it is not the individual per se but the family as represented by the occupation of its head that is the basic unit of class structure (Goldthorpe 1987: 296), and certain categories of the unemployed and retired population can be allocated to class locations on the basis

of their last employment since neither the inclusion nor the exclusion of these categories of people significantly change the main pattern of relative rates and of the association between class and action. This holds true also for married women both in domestic and in paid employment. This is because, due to gender segregation in employment, women's class mobility is subject in essence not to labour market participation but to the marriage market in which qualities other than occupational ones determine the chances for mobility (Goldthorpe 1987: 281-296).

A Discussion of Some of the Methodological Issues Involved

The nature and the scope of restrictions imposed by conceptual choices and the assumptions underlying these assumptions raise several issues to be addressed. First, regardless of whether class locations and structure are conceptualised in terms of symbolic or material advantages and disadvantages, or exploitation and oppression, the idea of mediated class locations in one form or another reflects a major tension between individualistic and solidaristic conceptions of society and social relations. In the solidaristic conception, the household represents an embodiment of social solidarity and should therefore be taken as the unit of analysis in the class structure, whichever way the latter is perceived. This view seems to rest on the conception of household as a social group in which membership overrides all positions and roles deriving from social and domestic divisions of labour (see Sönmez 1998). Contrary to this, in the individualistic conception of society the household is either the locale into which individual class differences in the larger society are permitted to enter with their full implications or the very unit in which a different order of class relations exist. If this description of viewpoints is accurate, it is then a necessity for any mobility research undertaken within either of these conceptions to substantiate its own position by representative empirical evidence.

Second, class effect on mobility is generally located and examined in the context of intergenerational mobility rates and patterns by reference to the material, cultural, and social resources at the disposal of, and the mobility strategies employed by, the households acting as origins. This line of thinking treats households as if they are active agents only or largely in making use of the resources available and is concerned mainly with intergenerational mobility. But this goes against the evidence that households are also the generators of the very resources to be used for various strategies for both inter- and intra-generational mobility or, conversely the very agents which cannot make use of resources available to or generated by them. Thus there is a need to examine what kind of agency the households display in both inter- and intra-generational mobility and whether or not there are distinctive

patterns across time and space. Although building the process of inquiry into a usual mobility research may cause difficulties, there seems to be much to be gained from making a critical examination of the underlying assumptions and predictions concerning the social and cultural consequences of capitalist or industrial development.

Third, the underclass, which is excluded from mobility research by the very logic of conceptualisation, needs to be given serious consideration in examining mobility patterns and class structure (see Buckingham 1999, Morris and Scott 1996, Marshall, Roberts and Burgoyne 1996). The underclass is defined by Wright (1997: 27) 'as a category of social agents who are economically oppressed but not consistently exploited within a given class system' (Wright 1997: 27). As Mann's (1992) examination of the English case indicates, the underclass is mostly composed of people from working-class origins and as such it represents a division within the working-class. Furthermore, it comprises a significant proportion of people of working age and has acquired some degree of intergenerational permanency within the social structure. A systematic examination of the underclass can enhance our understanding of the process and consequences of mobility patterns in two interrelated ways. One is that it provides a test case to see whether or not it has a similar pattern of association with various factors that are considered to be important for mobility. The information obtained this way would then enable us to make a critical assessment of underlying assumptions about the primacy of certain factors in determining class locations and thus to see if the underclass is the result of class processes or subject to others sets of factors. In connection with this, the other way concerns the concept of mediated class location which makes it necessary to bring the underclass into usual mobility research in order to be more certain about the primacy assigned to social origins versus present class location derived from the occupational division of labour, and thus to enhance our understanding of the effect of various forms of distributive orders (individualistic, household, family, social welfare etc) in the formation of classes and class identities. There is, for instance, some evidence that social categories within the underclass show cultural characteristics and attitudes which are not different from those which characterize other people with a class location coming from the same social origins as do these underclass categories themselves (Marshall *et al.* 1988, quoted by Crompton 1996).

Fourth, despite the theoretical significance assigned to them, both property and income dimensions are only indirectly taken into account in mobility research. As Marx (1961: 155-163) would argue, all forms of property tend to assume the character of commodity and hence of capital within capitalism. In this sense any amount of property can be expressed in terms of its market value and capital-owning

classes can hence be ranked accordingly. This, obviously, is not the way in which both Wright and Goldthorpe operationalize the division within the bourgeoisie. Instead, they operationalize the qualitatively distinct subclasses within the bourgeoisie in terms of the number of people from whom surplus is extracted. This leaves not only direct (leasers of property and capital) and indirect (house owners, etc.) rentiers outside the mobility research but also under-represents the immobilizing effects of certain forms of property. For instance, as Erikson and Goldthorpe's (1992) analysis indicates, there is a noticeable degree of immobility among the individuals coming from landowning families. In the case of Turkey, Karpat (2003), Akşit (1985), and Sönmez (1993, 2001) report cases of gradual downward mobility among the rich landowning families in both absolute and relative terms when compared to the upward mobility experienced by small landowners who have taken advantage of opportunities arising from emerging labour markets. It is surely the case that class and class mobility are not a direct function of the amount of property or income, and minor gradations within each class should be muted for the sake of understanding qualitative differences and achieving theoretical simplicity. Yet, the same gradations in the amount of property and income acquire critical importance when the households are making plans and employing strategies for intergenerational mobility especially through education. This is because, in most phases of structural transformation of both the rural and urban economies, employment and exploitation of child labour remains one of the vital sources of manpower and income in the survival strategies of households. Therefore, it is important to find out the causal significance of the income earned (or the labour power provided) by the children for the survival of the household and, together with other possible factors, for both intra- and intergenerational mobility.

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