

BOOK REVIEW

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Cătălin Augustin Stoica, *Introduction to the Study of Stratification and Social Mobility: Theories, Measures and Models of Analysis (Introducere în studiul stratificării și mobilității sociale: teorii, măsuri și modele de analiză)*, Tritonic Publishing House, Bucharest, 2022.

Cătălin Augustin Stoica holds a PhD in Sociology from Stanford University (USA) since 2005, with consistent and long-standing national and international research experience, expertise in social research methodology, advanced statistical analysis methods, sociological surveys and opinion polls, sociology of transition, stratification and social inequalities. In 2000, he was awarded *The LaPierre Award for Best Third Year Paper (i.e., Qualifying Exam Paper)* by the Department of Sociology, Stanford University.

Between 2007-2015, the sociologist Cătălin Augustin Stoica was general director of the Centre for Urban and Regional Sociology (CURS), where he coordinated more than 10 specialists in social, political and marketing research and more than 300 collaborators. Currently, Professor Stoica teaches courses in Sociological Survey Methodology, Research Methods and Techniques in Sociology and Psychology, Social Stratification, Economic Anthropology (Master), Social Stratification and Inequality (Master) in the Department of Sociology at the National University of Political Science and Public Administration (SNSPA) - Bucharest. His research findings have been presented at numerous national and international conferences and published in volumes in Romania, USA, Germany and Poland. He was vice-president of the *Romanian Sociologists Society*, member of the *Romanian Society of Cultural Anthropology*, member of the *American Sociological Association (ASA)*, founding member and former vice-president of the *Romanian Students Association at Stanford University*.

For my younger sociological colleagues, I would like to remind that CURS was established in the 70s and 80s by bringing together young social research

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enthusiasts from the Urban Sociology Laboratory of the Capital City and the Sociological Research and Studies Laboratory of the IPCT (Institute of Design for Standard Constructions). In the years before the collapse of communism, researchers from the CURS precursor carried out studies on urban sociology, industrial sociology, quality of life and labour migration. Among the researchers of that period, we mention Dorel Abraham, Cezara Nicolau, Dumitru Sandu, Ana Bălașa, Vladimir Tismăneanu, Alin Teodorescu, Radu Ioanid, Mircea Kivu and many others who became after 1990 reference names in the field of social sciences, both in Romania and abroad. Over three decades of operation, CURS has carried out a wide range of research, studies and opinion polls commissioned by government agencies, non-governmental organisations, embassies, local and multinational companies, political parties and the media.

Sociologist Cătălin Augustin Stoica is the author of the volume *Continuous Romania: Change and Adaptation in Communism and Postcommunism (România continuă: Schimbare și adaptare în comunism și postcomunism)*, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest 2018. Together with sociologist and anthropologist Vintilă Mihăilescu he coordinated the volume *The Winter of Our Discontent: The Romanian Protests from January-February 2012 (Iarna vrajbei noastre: Protestele din Romania, ianuarie-februarie 2012)*, Paideia Publishing House, Bucharest. 2012. He is co-author (with Professors Alfred Bulai and Doina Olga Ștefănescu) of *Sociology - Handbook for the 11th Grade (Sociologie. Manual pentru Clasa a XI-a)*, Humanitas Educational Publishing House, Bucharest, 2006. Recently, Professor Stoica published the book *Introduction to the Study of Stratification and Social Mobility: Theories, Measures and Models of Analysis (Introducere în studiul stratificării și mobilității sociale: teorii, măsuri și modele de analiză)*, Tritonic Publishing House, Bucharest, 2022, 310 pages, which I will discuss in this article.

First and foremost, the work of the SNSPA professor is a premiere in the sociological literature in Romania, providing a consistent „introduction” to theoretical and empirical approaches on social stratification and mobility. On this topic, sociologists Cătălin Zamfir, Dumitru Sandu, Liviu Chelcea, Paula Tufiș, Mihai-Dinu Gheorghiu, Traian Rotariu, Norbert Petrovici, Cristina Raț and Cristian Pop have also written articles in volumes and scientific journals. An outstanding contribution to the study of social stratification is represented by Cristi Pop's book – *Social classes in Romania: Methodology of Inequality (Clase sociale în România: Metodologia inegalităților)*, published in 2016, in whose footsteps Professor Stoica his own work on stratification and social mobility.

A starting point in the study of social stratification was the annual research on cultural consumption practices the *Barometer of cultural consumption (Barometrul de consum cultural)* initiated by sociologist Liviu Chelcea within the Centre for Cultural Studies and Research of the Ministry of Culture, established in 2005. The *Barometer* surveys provided information outlining the relationship between cultural consumption and social class membership, inspired by Pierre Bourdieu's now classic researches. During Cătălin Augustin Stoica's leadership at CURS, a sociological research was conducted on *Class Structure and Social*

Stratification in Contemporary Romania (Structură de Clasă și Stratificare Socială în România Contemporană), which contributed to the in-depth study on social stratification and social mobility, the results of this project being highlighted in the pages of his book.

The volume *Introduction to the Study of Stratification and Social Mobility (Introducere în studiul stratificării și mobilității sociale)* is structured in four main chapters: (1) Social stratification: introductory notions; (2) Theories of social stratification; (3) Social stratification schemes; (4) Social mobility measures. The first two chapters contain theoretical approaches, at times scholastic, but also examples provided for teaching purposes, which familiarise the reader with the subject of social stratification and mobility. The author starts by defining the concept of *social stratification*, invoking the correlated concepts of *social inequality*, *social hierarchy*, *social structure*, *social capital*, *social status* and *social class*, insisting on a sociological approach to this issue.

From the very beginning, social stratification is defined as a situation or condition in which people have unequal access to resources ("highly valued things") in society. The inequality of capital (economical, social, cultural) held by individuals differentiates, hierarchises and places individuals in a vertically ordered structure, which can be spatially represented as a social pyramid. Individuals at the top of the social pyramid benefit from power and privilege, whereas those at the bottom are the consequence of the exercise of power and the distribution of resources within society. To make this concept explicit and operational, the author refers to the theoretical contributions of sociologists such as Anthony Giddens, Pierre Bourdieu, Gerhard Lenski, Max Weber, Traian Rotariu, Petre Iluț, but especially follows in the footsteps of Martin Marger. The author defines social stratification as „a vertical ordering of individuals or groups within a society according to their forms of capital, social influence and life chances. Both social influence and life chances are ultimately determined by the forms of capital people have, both directly and indirectly through their family/social origins.”

The theoretical construction of social stratification is supported by references from Marxist sociology of social classes (K. Marx, Fr. Engels), Erik Olin Wright's neo-Marxist perspective, Max Weber's contribution on social classes, domination and power, Ralf Dahrendorf's theory of conflict, the functionalist paradigm in sociology, G. Lenski's synthesis of conflict theory and functionalist theory, sociology of elites (Vf. Pareto, G. Mosca, R. Michels, Ch. Wright Mills, W.G. Domhoff).

Inspired by the Marxist sociology of social classes, the author defines the elite as a class (minority) that controls the means of production, benefits from power and privileges, in opposition to the rest of society (the majority/mass/population) that has to sell its labour force. In essence, Marxist sociology insists that the economic determines the configurations of social, political, and legal institutions and the relations between individuals, groups, social classes, the „superstructure” (Marx). Those who own the resources (capital) command and impose their ideas. According to classical elite theories, society is

inevitably led by an elite (governmental elite, ruling class, oligarchy) made up of those individuals who, by virtue of inherited or acquired qualities ("resources", *cf.* Stoica), position themselves at the top of the social pyramid, exercising and/or influencing power, making strategic decisions, controlling the distribution of wealth that accumulates in society.

In my view, the concept of *elite* can be operationalised in two dimensions: (1) the qualitative dimension referring to the best individuals in their field and (2) the quantitative dimension in the sense that the best in a field are also the fewest, they constitute a minority in relation to the rest. The sociology of the elite includes within its scope of interest those who belong to the elite and who are distinguished from others by their power, influence and capital (economic, social, cultural). By these attributes members of the elite recognise each other and at the same time distinguish themselves from what is considered non-elite. The term *elite* can have positive connotations when it is associated with the idea of merit, value, excellence, but it can also have negative connotations when it refers to the idea of exclusivity, conspiracy, privilege. Members of the elite are not always selected, recruited and promoted on the basis of merit, effort, professional achievements, social value recognised and appreciated by society. In fact, more often than not, those who represent the power elite (Wright Mills) are the result of how inequality operates within society. Social and economic inequality generates hierarchy, organisation and social stratification. I would also point out that, in agreement with Mills and in disagreement with Marx, Domhoff believes that the domination of the power elite does not mean total control over society. On the contrary, there are a multitude of social, economic, cultural or religious issues within society that do not enter into the area of the power elite's interest. It is particularly interested in big businesses, that are considered „strategic” and that consolidate power and influence in society.

In the section on recent approaches on social stratification and social inequality, the author brings together neo-Durkheimian contributions, modern world system theory (Wallerstein) and Thomas Piketty's recent contribution on the role of *Capital in the 21st Century* in the increase of wealth inequality. In agreement with economist Th. Piketty, sociologist Cătălin A. Stoica notes that if Karl Marx had had statistical data (time series) on the income and expenditure of the population, his predictions on the imminent collapse of capitalism would have been somewhat more reserved. With advanced databases and statistical analysis tools at his disposal, Piketty shows that, since 1960, we are witnessing a widening of socio-economic inequality, which is attributed to the fact that the return on capital ("patrimonial capitalism" based on accumulations from rents and investments) significantly exceeds the rate of economic growth. Moreover, and rightly so, economic growth does not mean prosperity for all. Romania can always be an example of a country where economic growth coexists with poverty. According to the National Institute of Statistics, the estimated gross domestic product (GDP) for 2021 increased by 5.9% compared to 2020 while 34.4% of the Romanian population was at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE indicator, *cf.* Eurostat, 2021).

Chapters 3 and 4 of the SNSPA professor's book introduce the reader to the empirical approach on social stratification. The first stratification scheme described is the *International Standard Classification of Occupation* - ISCO developed by the International Labour Office (ILO) of the United Nations (UN). One of the premises underlying this stratification scheme - argues Cătălin A. Stoica - is the fact that, in most contemporary societies, there is a statistically significant correlation between educational attainment, qualifications, skills and occupation. The application of this scheme in statistical research on the labour force structures occupations into major groups, minor groups and sub-groups of occupations. Even the National Statistical Institute uses this scheme in its surveys to collect, process and analyse data on occupations and job vacancies.

Taking up Erik Olin Wright's conceptual apparatus presented in Chapter 2, the author shows how Romania's class structure can be represented, using data from *The European Social Survey* - ESS, a survey conducted every two years at the initiative of the *European Science Foundation*. The presentation of social stratification research methodology also includes aspects related to measuring the prestige of occupations: surveys or the prestige scale technique, Goldthorpe's social class schemes and their updates, and the measurement of (subjective) perceptions of individuals' positions in the hierarchy of society or social classes.

In exploring social mobility, Cătălin A. Stoica resorts somewhat scholastically (didactically) to the bivariate statistical analyses used since the middle of the last century to get an intuitive picture of the processes in question. The bivariate analysis uses data from population and housing censuses, selective statistical surveys, administrative sources and sociological research data. Mainly, the constructed variables are the following: education or schooling level, parents' occupation or social class, the occupation of children or respondents. The data obtained are centralised in double entry tables with the help of which the social mobility of the children (respondents) is described. Cătălin A. Stoica presents such tables with the „school destiny structure” (*outflow table*) with data including from a research carried out by CURS in 1999. This section of the book abounds in mathematical formulas, statistical processing and calculations that are sure to arouse the interest of quantitative sociologists and beyond.

Last but not least, the sociological approach to social stratification and social mobility shows that even in the case of the careers of tycoons like Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos, Mark Zuckerberg, Elon Musk and other rich people of this world, we have to take into account the fact that the equation of personal success also includes elements related to the social class of origin or a combination of social, economic, cultural resources of their parents/family/social environment. In short, in today's society, shaken by all kinds of crises (pandemic, economic, wars), in which the rich become even richer, „socio-economic status is acquired rather than inherited (in the sense of reproducing advantages from previous generations)” - says sociologist Cătălin A. Stoica.

In a conversation with the author, I found out that, in his next book, he will also address issues of gender inequality based on ethnicity, racial group or

BOOK REVIEW

other disadvantaged, marginalized, socially excluded groups. *Introduction to the Study of Stratification and Social Mobility (Introducere în studiul stratificării și mobilității sociale)* is a must-read for students, teachers and researchers in the social and political sciences, but also for any reader who is passionate about understanding the complexity of the society, the world we live in, with all its joys and sorrows.