

Proletarianization with polarization: Industrialization, globalization, and social class in Turkey, 1980–2005

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the social class structure of Turkey during the latest wave of economic globalization in four dimensions: by sector of employment, with the Erikson–Goldthorpe–Portocarero (EGP) class schema, by occupational group, and in terms of informal employment. Since 1980, when Turkey opened to the global economy, the Turkish social class structure changed significantly. During this period, Turkey became a significant exporter of mostly low-technology, but also increasingly medium- and high-technology, manufactured goods. I contend that this economic globalization and industrialization contributed to a dual process of proletarianization and polarization. Proletarianization occurred through a transition from Turkey's agrarian tradition, a relative decline of the public sector, and an expansion of classes who sell their labor without workplace authority. Polarization entailed the growth of private-sector entrepreneurial, professional and managerial classes, and a simultaneous expansion of the informal sector. There were also differences between sexes. The share of manufacturing employment and the low-skilled labor classes expanded at rates much higher among women than among men, contributing to more rapid proletarianization.

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The recent debate on social class centers on the applicability of class as a concept to an understanding of the organization and structure of contemporary societies. In recent decades, the usefulness of social class as a concept and its explanatory power in issues such as voting behavior and political attitudes has been questioned (e.g. Clark & Lipset, 2001; Kingston, 2000; Pakulski & Waters, 1996; Roberts, 2002). Post-modernist critiques advanced the position that in contemporary

societies, other dimensions of inequality and non-class identities such as gender, and race and ethnicity are more important than social class as a basis of social belonging and action (see Grusky and Weeden, 2005 for a review of these critiques). These theorists conceptualize contemporary societies as aggregates of individuals, who are shaped through a wide variety of identities, rather than being composed of social agglomerations on the basis of economic interest or exploitation.

Against this rising tide of criticism, there have been a number of attempts from prominent scholars in the field of social stratification to defend the concept of social class. Many of these attempts shared an effort to devise

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a better operationalization of social class.¹ In his defense of social class in general and the Marxist understanding of social class in particular, Wright (1997, 2005), reiterates the importance of the concept of exploitation and its relevance to understanding labor relations in contemporary labor markets.² Although labor market structure has changed over time, he argues that we can still identify social classes based on this concept. Portes (2000) begins his defense of social class by rejecting both the claim that modern societies are amassed individuals and the assumption that classes must be “consciously mobilized social aggregates”. Instead, he calls for a departure from 19th century class typologies. Although he maintains the classic Marxist differentiation of dominant and subordinate classes, he calls for a new operationalization, which takes into account the changes in ownership structures, and the role of immigration. As a result, he defines the main classes as dominant capitalists, capitalists, and rentiers; while the subordinate classes are elite workers, common workers, petty entrepreneurs and redundant workers (Portes, 2000).

Other class analysts have proposed a move towards micro-classes and for relaxing the assumptions of nominalist class schemas. Grusky and Weeden (2005) contend that the limitations of class in explaining social phenomena lie in the poor operationalization of social class. They claim that social classes defined as occupational groups perform much better than traditional and more general class schemas. Earlier, Grusky and Sørensen (1998) made a similar argument that “class analytic processes” such as collective action and exploitation are more visible at the occupational level than the aggregate class level.

¹ By the late-1990s, there were two prevailing class schemas created by sociologists: Erikson–Goldthorpe–Portocarero (EGP) (Erikson, Goldthorpe, & Portocarero, 1979) and the Wright class schema (Wright, 1985). The EGP class schema, later further operationalized by Erikson and Goldthorpe (1992), allocates working people into eleven (collapsible to seven) social classes based on occupation, ownership, and authority. It became widely adopted in the stratification and mobility research in the 1980s and the 1990s partly thanks to the success of the Comparative Analysis of Social Mobility in Industrial Nations (CASMIN) Project led by Erikson and Goldthorpe themselves. Wright (1985) proposed a schema of twelve social classes with the introduction of “contradictory class locations” in order to overcome the problems, which challenged scholars in the Marxist tradition, such as the separation of ownership and control, and the failure of the labor theory of value. Wright (1997) also initiated a cross-national comparative survey of social classes, although smaller in scope than the CASMIN project.

² In a provocative account, Sørensen (2000) also proposed a class map based on exploitation, but which is operationalized through property rights and economic rents.

Despite these lively debates, and clear, cumulative contributions, one noteworthy limitation of contemporary class analysis is the prevailing concentration on developed or already industrialized countries. Although a smaller but significant literature exists on less developed countries (henceforth LDCs), more research is needed to achieve better and widely applicable theories of class and social stratification.³ Even within work on LDCs, most research has focused on Latin American and East Asian countries.⁴ To the best of my knowledge, there have been relatively few efforts in English to systematically study social class in LDCs.

Earlier work on the class structures of LDCs focused on testing the theory of industrialization, which claims that inequality declines with industrialization. In their comparison of Bolivia and United States, for example, Kelley, Robinson, and Klein (1981) argued that inequality increases with the transition from simple to complex agricultural societies, and declines in the transition to industrial societies. Haller and his colleagues’ studies on Brazil over the years (e.g. Bills & Haller, 1984; Bills, Haller, Kelley, Olson, & Pastore, 1985; Kelley & Haller, 2001) reached somewhat similar conclusions. In other significant studies, many published in *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, scholars analyzed the relationship between industrialization, and class and inequality in LDCs generating mixed evidence on the effect of industrialization (Gordon, 1987 on Jamaica; Hsiao, 1987, and Marsh & Hsu, 1994 on Taiwan; Koo, 1985 and Park, 2004 on Korea; Neves, 2005 on Brazil).⁵

In one of the few systematic attempts to study class structure in LDCs, in 1985, Portes drew a comprehensive class map of Latin America. Portes innovatively added the criteria of control over labor and method of compensation to the classical Marxist dichotomy according to the ownership of the means of the production.

³ Prominent anthologies in the field of social stratification, such as Grusky (2001) include few references to LDCs. An analysis of over 15,000 papers presented in the meetings of Research Committee 28 (RC 28) of International Sociological Association between 1983 and 2002, showed that only around 8% of the papers presented were on LDCs (excluding East Europe and Russia) (see Hout & DiPrete, 2006 for a review of the papers presented in RC 28 conferences).

⁴ There is a rich literature on the social stratification and mobility patterns of ex-communist countries (e.g. Nee, 1991, 1996; Zhou, 2004). However, the distinct character of the social and economic structures in these countries makes it harder to compare these studies with the studies of class structure in LDCs.

⁵ The deindustrialization of the early-industrialized countries created a heated debate about the link between industrial employment and globalization (see Brady & Denniston, 2006). However, the debate and empirical analyses did not really expand to developing countries, which are supposedly on the receiving end of the industrial restructuring.

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