

THE SOCIAL FUNCTIONS OF MIDDLE CLASS: IMPLICATIONS FOR BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Review Paper

ANALIZA SOCIJALNIH FUNKCIJA SREDNJE KLASE: IMPLIKACIJE ZA BOSNU I HERCEGOVINU

Pregledni naučni rad

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Abstract

Reason(s) for writing and research problem(s): It is an obvious social fact that is in process the disappearance of the middle class and all those qualities that bind to its existence. The theory emphasizes that in relatively stable and structured societies middle class has the function of balancing the social order, culture, socialization and social predictability. The middle class disappearance means at the same time damage of such social processes and conditions.

Aims of the paper (scientific and/or social): The goals are to emphasize the need of revitalization of the middle class social values and creating an environment where the social habit of middle class will be established as a normative guideline. Warning to this problem is actually warning of the disappearance of those social attributes that bind to regulated social world.

Methodology/Design: The research methodology is mainly relied on the theoretical analysis, observation and contently is relating to reflexive sociology. Methodological more completely approach would be resulted in the fully examine of the real cultural capital and habitus of the middle class. Findings would proof that the roles and statuses of actually members of the middle class are likely in in congruency, as well as their cultural capital.

Research/paper limitations: Limitations of this study are significant because research was not conducted by a detailed methodological procedures and empirical testing of hypotheses, but the work could represent a very inspirational initial phase of one such study.

Results/Findings: In this paper lacks empirical results but in theory, an important conclusion is that in any organized society need the middle class as a corrective to the social turbulence and unpredictability.

General conclusion: The general findings may relate to the fact that this problem needs to radicalise and discuss the dynamics of the disappearance of the middle class through the prism of a new transitional, post-modern and post-traditional societies where there are no social security nor certainty in which they might take place normal social development.

Research/paper validity: Justification of research is reflected in recognizing the implications of the disappearance of the middle class.

Keywords

the middle class, social crisis, cultural capital, social control, quality

The drama in Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H) has generated many tragic states of society and paradoxes, which, by definition, belong to the category of unintended social circumstances. A number of features were evident during and after the war: deterioration of big industrial complexes which employed the significant numbers of workers; forcible migrations; bad and unfair transition; and the decay of broad sections of the working and middle class. For many people in B&H the war has permanently changed life conditions. The negative dynamic caused the disappearance, or at least significant impoverishment, of the existing middle class. One of the images that captures this process is the appearance and flourishing of numerous flea markets in all the cities of B&H. It is only necessary to walk through them and one can recognize people with very different social status, but with a common need to establish a rational basis for their economic survival. Many of the casual sellers offer goods that indicate their previous social status. Their being there is the consequence of general poverty, and this is the location where the chances for a basic minimum level of economic survival exist. Flea markets did not exist in such a large number before the war, and they were not the source of economic survival. But today, for many people they are. Flea markets have become the place of encounter for many marginal social groups, the unemployed, and some members of the middle class (the unemployed ones, fired clerks, engineers, lawyers, technicians, teachers, and other college educated persons). At the same time, a significant number of buyers, still belonging to the middle class, buy the goods that indicate their existing social status and system of values. The offer of goods is not homogenous and elementary, but it includes valuable books, paintings, LP-s, CD-s of classical music, technical equipment, branded clothing and shoes, furniture and porcelain. Some of the sellers of the goods offered are former members of the middle class, but one common characteristic of the goods offered is that they are cheap and customers come from the same class as sellers.

On the other hand, in some other public places, one can see the images that represent power and wealth, which generate the conclusion that this society is deeply socially differentiated. Approaches to analysis of these social phenomena in sociology belong to the method of observation with participation and visual analysis of given contexts.

What does this picture indicate, apart from social inequality? First, the working class lost its rights in negotiation over wealth and it has ceased to be a factor of social changes for the better; second, the flea market is the typical informal institution of crisis and public poverty; third, part of the middle class has been disqualified; and, fourth, the social functions of the middle class are greatly reduced concerning the balance among classes. In everyday speech, we can often hear that the loss of the middle class is an indication of social crisis. In common sense, that is true, but we have to address the question of how it happened. The pre-war middle class has fallen apart due to a number of reasons, of which the most important are the following: the war, in which all the structures of the nation have become impoverished; migration to the West, or to the centers of national origin; the exclusion from certain middle class structures (dismissal from work positions, national intolerance); a transition period with enduring crisis and poverty; a generational transition during which one generation has simply perished (retirement, loss of job, old age, death, and the like). At the same time, since the society in the

transition period found itself in a new and complex net of relations (a huge rate of unemployment, strong migration tendencies at the same time as the opening of new work positions in the private, public and banking sectors), certain changes in class structure have happened. One of the aspects of these changes is a new emerging middle class in the transitional period. What we are concerned about is its relation towards the other members of society.

According to the criterion of profession, the non-manual professional groups are located between the ruling class and the manual working class (Jary&Jary, 1991). The concept "middle class" reflects in itself a difference in relation to other classes, from its relation to capital, occupation, employment market, consumption, prestige to the differences in the view of class conscience, ideology, values, attitudes and life style. But, in spite of all of these advantages, the position of the middle class is socially inferior in relation to the owners of capital.

Historically, the origin of the middle class is connected with changes in the character of work, production and services, where non-manual work became important and significant. The classical dichotomy of society in two basic classes (workers and capitalists) lost its importance because the traditional industrial manual workers were no longer a dominant resource of wealth in capitalism. That is what the middle class has become now, which is the owner of specialized, intellectual, servicing and scientific work as a new source of expansion of wealth. Simply put, in the late modernity, the middle class occupations expanded into the spheres of industry, services, media, entertainment and its products (movies, books, music, etc.). The number of manual occupations significantly decreased. The increase of non-manual occupations and development of small business and specialized services caused theoretical problems for the Marxist paradigm of classes and social stratification. Concerning the above issue, what I want to stress is the fact that theorizing about the middle class in the pre-war period in the former Yugoslavia was of poor quality, non-empirical, ironic and extremely ideological. Marxist analysis and its interpretation were glorified, occasionally becoming tacky (Leksikon socioloških pojmova, Klasa, 1982, Žubrinić, 1975). Pre-war social theory was mostly oriented to serve the justification and protection social system of that time, i.e. socialism, and it served the official ideology. Other theoretical alternatives were out of question. In the late 1980s discussion was oriented to the problem of differentiation (Hošek&Momirović, 1985; Sekulić, 1985; Sekulić 1987). Post-war social theory was based on national animosities and did not pay attention to realities which were very important (poverty, ruralization of society, social isolation of B&H society, falling behind current trends in social development). At the same time, the ideological element in theory was extremely strong.

Having been built upon such a theoretical heritage and paradigm, B&H sociology is not capable of giving an answer to a number of questions concerning this class in B&H. These questions are the following: what does middle class mean, what are its social functions, which values does it prefer, how does it behave in the ups and downs of economic rhythms, what is its range, when does it become radical, how does it protect its status identity, what is its socio-demographic background, what are the social matrices upon which it grew, what is its self-concept, what are its criteria of excellence and success, how does it shape the social space in which the competition for power and domination go on, what is its codex of gaining the position, how does it socially discipline itself, how does it develop in open/half-open/closed societies, how does it use the resources that have emerged from social mobility, what is its social quality? There are other questions, such as: how does the middle class represent, vitalize, restore, and preserve

the culture and language of society, how does it organize and construct social time, what negotiating strategies does it use while expressing its interests, how does it express non-material and general interests, how does it initiate the generation of social capital, how does it make sense of publicity surrounding social problems and how moral panic is produced in relation to them, how does it organize the elements of formal and informal institutions of social control, how does it distribute ideas about fashion and life style, how does it create social movements?

These questions are at the same time my own reasons for needing to consult the British theoretical scene in order to give answers to the basic questions of my project: what are the social functions of a middle class?

What we can state is that the middle class of B&H is segmented, diffused, and composed of a series of different groups with different value and interest definitions about the national, urban, business, university, artistic and entertainment and media areas. But this is not its only distinctive characteristic. We emphasize a number of specific, important characteristics of relative significance as part of the B&H middle class (not total, of course):

- The B&H middle class, through war and the transitional period, is segmented and weakly connected, incapable to create social changes;
- It has been created by the ruling politics, incapable of defining its own political interest outside of the centers of power;
- It exhibits its social advancement only through more intensive consumption;
- Its basic advance up the hierarchy was gained only by education;
- Lacking an urban-civilian heredity, the present middle class did not develop from the urban middle class;
- The present middle class has been socially composed from the lower social classes, especially from the rural ones;
- Since the Bosnian village is poor, socially isolated, patriarchal and underdeveloped, it experienced emigration. But some parts of the emigrant population have become members of the urban middle class, and their basic cultural pattern from their rural background did not change, even as they climbed up the hierarchical system.

My aim is to prove the consequences of having a strong middle class on the present state of B&H society, i.e., to postulate and prove the following hypothesis: "A segmented middle class does not constitute a moral and social order, and that is why it does not perform its social functions in compliance with the status and roles that have been assigned to it". In another words, society must be predictable for its actors to be functional, and statuses and roles must be in compliance with the stressed ethical and socialized dimension. There is a much evidence of misuse of the middle class status position in our reality, involving university professors, bankers, doctors, lawyers, judges, local oligarchs and scandals of every kind. Concretely, the social chaos resulted in fact that certain national groups, during the war and after the war, took positions which belonged, by definition, to middle class position. The criterion for election on certain positions was not professionalism but nationality. It is not strange that, for example, pre-war taxi driver became the majority owner of some company or a manager of some important institutions. At the same time culture and art are severely neglected, weakly protected by the system and condemned to bare survival. Turbo-folk became mainstream and a recognizable

sign of success. This country does not possess enough capacity to endure the damage caused by the irresponsibility of its actors.

What are the most visible characteristics of the present middle class?

- A lack of preparation for publicity and public speech;
- Unexpected, sudden, and unprepared contact with money and elements of the culture of money, which are visible and obvious in irresponsible consumption;
- Constant liabilities and borrowing, and vulgar spending of surplus income on cars and status symbols;
- A cultural preference for the “culture” of turbo-folk production and popular aesthetic-moral figures, such as “pevaljka – singer;”
- Relatively frequent conflicts and breach of peace in public places and in traffic;
- A tendency to glorify central political leaders;
- A tendency to physical unfitness and vulgar consumption of food (insisting on the consumption of meat, which becomes the symbol of social security);
- Contact with ruling structures, because rural structures have never previously had functional contact with them;
- A tendency to scandal, which can be understood as a kind of metaphor for power;
- Choosing types of education with quick prospects for termination (law school, economics, political science, social work); and
- Gaining middle class professional status exclusively through migration, with political power and education as the basic mobility channels.

What is important to stress here is habitus, i.e., the way of living, the value system, inclinations and expectations of newly created middle class actors. Habitus defines the present and the future decisions that would be considered normal and rational. According to P. Bourdieu, habitus forms “an endless (infinite) capability of creating products – thoughts, ideas, expressions and actions,” which could be socially visible and connected with taste (according to Haralambos, Holborn 2002). Tastes could be different, and research inquiring into middle class tastes indicates their quality.

Criminological context of middle class

The emergence of modernity is associated with the emergence of social discipline, social control, and defocused power that is associated with the formation of the middle class. The function of the middle class in modern times is to mediate between the classes, especially the lower and government, in terms of establishing order, hierarchy and new forms of knowledge. Here we are on the trail of Michel Foucault’s observations on insanity, prison, delinquency, sexuality and social isolated structures. The middle class is in the hierarchical position to accumulate and create knowledge that is converted into power. What defines modernity is knowledge that is inextricably linked with power and its technologies: social discipline and control. Central studies in this discourse is “Discipline and Punish: the emergence of the prison”(Fuko, 1997) in which Foucault argues that there are two processes: the disappearance of the arbitrariness of

the monarch and disciplining criminals. The act of punishment becomes impersonal through prison and gradually, no longer punishes the body of criminal, but acts upon his time. The body is no longer the object of punishment, but it becomes human time. This basically means that the emerging structure of the officials conducting these processes deeply incorporate the idea of law, morality and respect for social order. Without adequate knowledge, morality and values related officer, a member of the middle class; he could not count on the state service. In "The Archaeology of Knowledge," Foucault radicalizes the idea of discipline so that proves to be the punishment of drowning in social functioning is according to the principle that every form of discipline procedures daily life (Fuko, 1998). The disciplined person corrects itself in violation of the norms of yielding to and becomes the subject of self-torture. The violation of rules become a personal foul and what really works is that the person is self-controlled. Punishment does not belong only to the discourse in prison, but turns into a discourse of education, hospitals, factories, universities, barracks, institutions which promote and conduct negotiations with the outside social reality. It can be done only with qualified middle class Social control and discipline is being operationalized through daily labeling, classification, and the semiotics of discipline. Those who refuse discipline are punished (Kadić, 2012). In this respect, Foucault marks four techniques that enable discipline: organization of space, controlling activities, education development processes and combining forces. All of these techniques can be implemented by a qualified and educated middle class. Society must be experienced to be spatially classified through which is enable to directs controls and disciplines. This first happened in the barracks, prisons, and later in universities, schools, hospitals and industrial areas. In a developed form and the emergence of modern cities is associated with these techniques (a division of cities and urban areas in terms of their services

In this respect Foucault concludes that the architecture of cities can produce obedient and disciplined individuals, subjects of the knowledge-power discourse.

Foucault confronts us with a rhetorical question "What is unusual in the fact that prison resembles factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all again look like a prison." (Fuko, 1997). From the standpoint of our society, we can say that all management techniques, power-knowledge, discipline and social control, are extremely controversial and unsuccessful. An unqualified or weak middle class not only lacks knowledge, but has also very limited power to implement techniques of social discipline and control. A string of assaults on representatives of the middle class, corruption, caricature organizing institutions, excessive bureaucratization and lack of confidence make this society a favorable environment for crime and all forms of uncontrolled response to the problems faced. Thanks to the fact that the society has produced a series of dependencies on external control (international community) and a number of risk institutions (e.g. the Office of the High Representative) which enable to the parties in power to be on the top of social chaos in B&H.

What is the need for a study like this one?

It is necessary for the following reasons:

- To explain with theoretical clarity and definition what the middle class is, and what its main social functions are, because this issue has been discussed in an ad hoc and ill-defined manner;

- To mobilize the sociology paradigms in this analysis (sociology is underdeveloped at this moment in B&H, and in a some way “prostituted” even by some sociologists);
- To analyze whether incongruity between middle-class status and the role of those structures that have created it perform adequately defined social roles;
- To estimate and test cultural capital, which the middle class maintains and represents, even in those social situations when it is impoverished, lacks support and finds in descent;
- To establish the criteria for determining what membership in the middle class means;
- To classify and systematize the B&H society’s class experience;
- To determine which structures are able to lead quality social changes, with full responsibility and a developed sensibility for the general public interest.

The middle class is relevant and significant, and it possesses the instruments to start social changes, but what is important to stress is that it must be responsible towards itself and others, together with rigorous instruments of formal and informal social control. This idea reminds me of Durkheim’s idea of organic solidarity, which is based on total and unquestionable identity of status and role, which is consistent with my idea of what the middle class would look like in this society.

Needs for further researches

To improve research and methodology techniques in analyzing this sort of social phenomena it includes the use of the comparative method, content analysis, secondary analysis, visual analysis, and, of course, construction of an inventory questionnaire for some aspects of the middle class way of life. It will result in increased theoretical capital and the potential and initiate a high-quality discussion in B&H sociology. Also important questions and answers would be:

- The impact of the “Occupy” protests, as important rebellion of middle class, on class structure, wealth distribution, and coalition building in the United States and whether they result in concrete policy demands;
- To study the relationship between socioeconomic status and higher education, particularly in light of several recent studies on economic segregation in higher education.
- Creating procedures and techniques of modeling which should be the synthesis of the idea of accelerated ascendance on a hierarchic scale, but without the corresponding time for achievement, without so called “ritual” time. The other model should stress the factors which intensively act in the sense of the definition of belonging to a position in a hierarchy.
- Creating empirical material, to put into theoretical frames, where they will be adequately interpreted. The empirical material will be collected on the basis of methods of observation, visual analysis of public places (cafes, theaters, flea markets, est.), use of public statistics, testing the students on certain aspects of middle class status (for example analysis of students’ hobbies, way of use of free time), analysis of press, and similar.
- It is important to consider locations where the B&H middle class live, and in that way it would be possible to understand how the social space is being disciplined or not.

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Sažetak

Inspiracija za rad i problem (i) koji se radom oslovljava (ju): Očigledna je socijalna činjenica da je na sceni nestanak srednje klase i svih onih kvaliteta koji se vežu za njeno postojanje. Teorija naglašava da u relativno stabilnim i strukturiranim društvima srednja klasa ima funkciju balansiranja socijalnog reda, kulture, socijalizacije i socijalne prediktivnosti. Njen nestanak ili znatno socijalno oštećenje povezano je i sa navedenim socijalnim procesima.

Ciljevi rada (naučni ili društveni): Ciljevi rada su da se naglasi potreba revitalizacije srednjeklasnih socijalnih vrijednosti i stvaranje ambijenta koji bi socijalni habitus srednje klase uspostavio kao normativan orijentir. Upozoravanje na ovaj problem je zapravo upozoravanje na nestanak onih socijalnih atributa koji se vežu za uređen socijalni svijet.

Metodologija/dizajn: Metodologija istraživanja se uglavnom oslanjala na teorijsku analizu, posmatranje i sadržajno se odnosi na refleksivnu sociologiju. Metodološki potpuniji pristup bi bio ako bi se u potpunosti ispitao stvarni kulturalni kapital i habitus pripadnika srednje klase po ulozi i statusu i vjerovatno bi utvrdili inkongruentnost srednjeklasnog statusa i srednjeklasnog kulturalnog kapitala.

Ograničenja istraživanja/rada: Ograničenja u ovom radu su znatna prije svega što nije provedena detaljna metodološka procedura i empirijska provjera hipoteza, ali rad bi mogao predstavljati veoma inspirativnu početnu fazu za jedno ovakvo istraživanje.

Rezultati/Nalazi: U ovom radu nedostaju empirijski rezultati ali u teorijskom pogledu važan zaključak jeste da je u svakom uređenom društvu potrebna srednja klasa kao korektiv socijalnih turbulencija i nepredvidljivosti.

Generalni zaključak: Generalni zaključak se može odnositi na činjenicu da treba radikalizirati ovaj problem i razmatrati dinamiku nestanka srednje klase kroz prizmu novog tranzicijskog, postmodernog i posttradicionalnog društva u kojem ne postoje socijalne sigurnosti niti izvjesnosti u kojima bi se mogao odvijati normalan socijalni razvoj.

Opravednost istraživanja/rada: Opravednost istraživanja se ogleda u uočavanju implikacija nestanka srednje klase.

Ključne riječi

srednja klasa, socijalna kriza, kulturalni kapital, socijalna kontrola, kvalitet

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