A CONSIDERATION OF THE SOCIAL CLASSIFICATION OF OCCUPATIONS FOR HISTORICAL DATA SOURCES

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The use of occupation as a key to revealing as near to reality as possible the circumstances of peoples' lives in the past is very well established. This source has depended upon a common methodology, at undergraduate (O'Connell,1988) and academic levels, to utilise the occupational data contained in the manuscript census enumerators' books. This methodology is commonly referred to as Armstrong's scheme of social classification of occupations. To receive the full benefits of both the census sources and the methodology, a full understanding of the classification scheme must be established. This would include the development of the scheme; its advantages and disadvantages; its value for applications; and lastly, any alternatives to it. Only when all these facets to the occupational classification scheme have been explored can the methodology be properly applied to the data sources, and thus help the development of correct insights to the Social Geography of past societies.

Census Enumerators' Books have been heavily utilised as data sources ever since the initial seminar paper, (Lawton, 1955) which illustrated the potential of the British 1831 Census Enumerators' books to define patterns of social and economic differentiation. This source is "as immensely rich source of information for social and economic historians" (Armstrong,1968). Despite such accolates, the books give "only an imperfect record" (Armstrong,1974). This imperfection stems from the nature of the Census as a "photographic still" (Holmes,1973) and as a "series of static cross-sections of society at decennial intervals precluding the study of dynamic processes of change within urban society" (Pooley,1979). This deficiency may cause the inclusion or exclusion of certain categories of exploration (Eversley,1966). Strangely, this weakness of the census as a data source is somewhat of a paradox; "the great strength of the census is that it gives a insight of an entire society at one moment in time, this is also its great weakness" (Holmes,1977). This shortcoming can be overcome by supplementation through the more traditional historical sources (Roberts,1974); or else by remaining more sensitive to the dynamic nature of urban life (Dennis,1980).

Another problem for the occupational analysis of the manuscript census enumerators' books is that some persons may over-state the relative importance of their occupation. This problem can be overcome by cross-reference between census material or by reference to contemporary material such as directories. The recording of people at one particular night of the year by the census, undermines its accuracy for certain occupational groups. This is especially true for seasonal occupations such as: sailors; fishermen; and labourers. This issue can be solved by remaining cognisant to the local and regional economies of the study area.

Despite some of its shortcomings the census remains a very valuable data source, unique because of its standard and uniform nature. This uniformity is useful for analysis, because: "Geography is not a vehicle for elucidating the particular features of unique places, but as a search for regularities and order" (Johnston,1971). This feature of the census allows cross-comparison between different towns and regions.

The manuscript census enumerators' books for Ireland,1901 and 1911, record nine separate items of information about every individual; the most useful for social classification and an analysis of the past being occupation. In contemporary societies occupation, more than any other factor determines income and social status. In previous times, "the connection between these dimensions of social ranking may have been somewhat looser but there is every reason to believe that it was nonetheless strong and pervasive" (Katz,1972). Other variables such as rateable valuations of housing may also be very useful for the study of people in the past. However, in practice, the "range of information available for the great majority of nineteenth-century individuals is rather limited" (Armstrong,1972). The only variable, for each individual, which has direct relevance to social standing is occupation. Other indications of social standing such as servant keeping do not allow distinctions to be made among the great majority of individuals who did not keep servants. Therefore, occupation is the only census variable which enables the placing in a systematic method all individuals under consideration into some form of a social classification.

Any analysis of occupations must begin by defining a limited number of categories into which occupations can be placed according to their social status; a need for "an invented scheme of classification to impose upon the empirical data to further understanding and facilitate

fruitful analysis" (Rosser and Harris,1965). A two-fold choice then occurs. The first method is to utilise one of the ready-made ones, with or without modifications; the second choice is for each researcher to determine a hierarchy of occupations. However, this latter course would result in no two people working on the same classification basis, because of the use of each individuals innate judgement to determine each and every occupation's social status. Comparisons would be impossible and the resulting studies of very little academic value.

Once the decisions to use a ready-made scheme has been taken, the next step is to determine which one is best suited to the data. This was the dilemma which faced Armstrong in his seminar article (1966); from this beginning he developed and refined a scheme of occupational social stratification for historical data sources. To solve the dilemma, the use of twentieth-century modern classifications were rejected because they were developed for modern high-quality data and thus too refined for nineteenth-century data. The scheme was to be developed for mid-nineteenth century British manuscript census enumerators' books, the 1901 to 1911 books for Ireland are similar in format and occupational trends. Only the British Registrar-General's social classification scheme of 1951 fitted the requirements set by Armstrong: which were avoidance of an over-refinement for laconic nineteenth-century data; and the inclusion of published lists of occupations for easy allocation and comparability (Armstrong,1972). Under this scheme all occupations are sub-divided beneath five broad categories with the basic aim of ensuring that "each category is homogenous in relation to the basic criterion of the general standing within the community of the occupations concerned" (Census,1951).

After considering the Registrar-General's classifications of 1911; 1921 and 1951; the latter was chosen. Although 1911 was closer to the nineteenth century, it was "a hasty effort and lacked the refinement of later attempts" (Armstrong,1972). A detailed analysis of the 1921 and 1951 schemes for York in 1841 to 1851 as a case study, (Armstrong,1974) revealed 1951 as the most original scheme. Nineteenth-century occupations, long vanished, were still included in the 1951 social classification of occupations scheme.

These categories or 'classes' were:

Class	I	Professional Occupations;
Class	II	Intermediate Occupations;
Class	III	Skilled Occupations;
Class	IV	Partly Skilled Occupations;
Class	V	Unskilled Occupations.

However, under consideration and individual cases some alterations were made:

(a) All those initially allocated to classes III or IV were upgraded a class if they employed one or more persons, not including members of their own family;

(b) Similarly those in Class III were upgraded to Class II where they employed at least one domestic servant or assistant other than members of their own family.

(c) All cases with inadequate information are placed in a residual class 'x';

(d) persons described as retired should be classified on the basis of their previous occupations, where the information is unclear they should be placed in the residual class;

(e) entries not classified for the twentieth century such as house proprietor, living off interest, independent means and paper are assigned to Classes I,I,I and Iv respectively;

(f) farmers to be classified in Class II unless they have less than five acres, then they are in Class III.

Individuals were allocated, upon consideration, into one of the six classes; a table (Armstrong,1974) listing most occupations is used to evaluate the class into which each occupation is allotted.

Although the scheme was initially successfully applied to York (Armstrong,1974) as a case study; subsequent other uses revealed several shortcomings and criticisms. Generally welcomed as a necessary attempt to aid the use of quantitative material in historical research (Flinn,1967; Colman,1967). The first major critique was actually as the 1951 Registrar-General's classification rather than specifically on

Armstrong's work (Cole,1955). The main flow of this criticism was the assignment to a particular class, not of each individual, but rather for each occupation as a whole. The whole of each name-group was assigned to the same class, and the possibility of breaking-up the group depended on it having been given a distinct name for the purpose of census enumeration. Thus, all teachers irrespective of income were in Class II. The allocation of pensioners to a class on the basis of their previous occupation was seen as unreal, particularly when people retire they experience a decline in income. The allocation would result in low-income persons in such groups as Class II or III.

The first criticism (Floud and Schofield,1968) which actually upon Armstrong's scheme was raised soon after its initial publication (Armstrong,1966). This dealt with the method of rejecting institutio and quasi-institutions from the sample when encountered, and replacing them with the next 'normal' household. This household had its own chance of selection as part of the population, but it gained an additional chance if the preceding quasi-institutional was selected. This caused a bias in the sample and thus a bias in the final analysis of the data. If the proportion of quasi-institutional households varied over a study area; the greater the account of them in one particular part of the area, the greater the bias would be.

The second criticism of Armstrong's scheme dealt with the "now characteristic over-large Class III" (Cowlard,1979). This problem occurred wherever the scheme has been used for nineteenth century Britain, e.g. 51% of the 1851 Chorley population (Warner,1973). Class III embraces several quite distinct types of occupation: skilled manual workers who are self-employed or work in small workshops; skilled manual workers who comprise the elite among factory workers; small shopkeepers and their non-manual workers such as clerks and shop-assistants. It is unlikely that all of these groups considered themselves as a coherent social class or even behaved as one. The large size and great diversity of Class III make any analysis of it, description dependent upon it difficult to sustain because of the limits it places upon the researcher.

The third major criticism is the question of changing job skills, and hence status over time. Occupations do change over time, becoming less skilled for instance, even though the name might remain the same; the scheme may not recognise this change. The choice of the base year is very important if one is, for instance, arguing that the occupational structure is somewhat different in 1901 from what it was

in 1891 as compared with 1911. In such dynamic situations the strictest attention has to be given to the base year to ensure scrupulous logic in making comparisons through time. Such points do not obviously matter if the researcher is comparing two towns for the same year (Harris,1971).

The anachronistic nature of the scheme was another shortcoming raised (Royle,1977); especially as to why a classification closer to the nineteenth century was not chosen. This closeness would reduce the difference over time between skill levels and status in my particular occupation.

A related issue is the ahistorical nature of the scheme; this is seen as a reflection of the lack of atonement to Victorian sensibilities (Dennis,1979). This failure to reflect nineteenth century contemporary ideas on occupational status precludes attempts towards an understanding of past social reality. Although this point is noted (Cowlard,1979) it is acknowledged that it is impossible to "know how the people in past societies would in fact have rated occupations in class (status) terms" (Banks,1974). Related to the awareness about contemporary ideas on class, is the lack of value of the scheme in relation to social relationships. The scheme is descriptive and does not reveal anything about the dynanism of class relations and class consciousness. This failure is due (Dennis,1979) to the lack of consideration to the theses of class formation and disintegration.

The emphasis upon the head of household as the visit of analysis is the final major criticism of the social classification. The analysis of the class structure of any particular town at any one particular point in time on this premise will fail to truly explain the social reality as it existed. A better method which should be analysed separately as a supplement to the usual (head of household) income, would be the consideration of the occupations of other wage-earners within the household. Some of these would be earning less than the household head because of age factors, but surely not all. A widow with no stated income will be classified as residual Class 'X'; however, there could be wage-earners in her household who will contribute to the overall household budget, but will not reckon in a social classification of the entire household. Thus, rendering a picture different to reality. The way to avoid this is to take cognisance of the entire household for a social classification.

These various critiques illustrate the value of not readily utilising the scheme without some consideration of its shortcomings. Shortcomings redressed by Armstrong, in most cases. The question of bias when quasi-institutions occur was rejected (Armstrong,1968) by virtue of modern census takers omitting them to focus attention upon the private household. The presumed biases in favour of households living adjacent to these quasi-institutions could up to a point be offset by different biases operating in respect of households adjacent to other institutions (e.g. churches) or land uses. Summarising his answer, Armstrong saw the frequency of quasi-institutions as very slight; and in the likelihood of their rejection the biases could be tested by comparing a sample of the population without the quasi-institutions to one of the entire population.

The 'bloated' nature of Class III was quickly recognised by Armstrong (Armstrong,1971). The solution to this was to have an industrial or occupational breakdown of the class, without "any implication that the ranking of one sub-section is in any way superior to that of the other" (Armstrong,1972). A solution was necessary because of the difficulty in respect of status in drawing distinctions between the diverse elements of this class.

The issue of the classification as an anachronism and its lack of relevance to contemporary Victorian ideas of occupation were both dealt with several times by Armstrong, beginning with his initial proposal of the scheme. In this the reasons for using the 1951 Registrar-General's classification of occupations was clearly deliberated upon and proven by verification with York in 1841-61 as a case-study. He agreed that the scheme was anachronistic in so much as it failed to correspond to the social hierarchy known to nineteenth-century contemporaries; but, "it is an unfortunate fact that we can never know how Victorians would have rated occupations in class terms" (Holmes and Armstrong,1978). This elusive solution to the issue has been similarly discovered in France (Danmard,1963). The related question of 'class reality' and the perceived failure of the scheme to deal with this was easily solved by Armstrong. The scheme was conceived as an occupational classification, it "does not assume that the 'class-structure' of a community had been established if its occupied population was merely to be assembled under these headings" (Armstrong,1972). Thus, people are reading too much into the scheme. A solution is to use the scheme for what it was designed for, i.e. a descriptive social classification only; and then describe the social and class relationships within a society with

reference to this merely as a useful descriptive device.

Although the merits and defects as perceived by others of Armstrong's social classification scheme of occupations have been discussed; some consideration of other schemes is necessary, if only to further highlight the advantages of Armstrong's scheme. The primary alternative is that of Royle (1977,1979). This allowed comparisons between different towns in terms of the various classes. Under Armstrong's scheme there would have been no difference. The new classification stratified populations by reference to their nineteenth century life-styles rather than as inevitably anachronistic twentieth-century view of their occupational status. The scheme proposed a five class division where the main innovations were: the grouping of the semi-skilled along with the unskilled in an enlarged lowest class; and the use of servant keeping. The scheme which was proposed to "enable much more meaningful comparisons to be made between different towns" (Royle,1977), was tested in several Leicestershire small towns. The scheme was adopted and used for Edinburgh (Gordon and Robb,1981), both test cases appeared satisfactory. The proposal was not without its critics. They saw the separation of servant keeping from occupation as aiding greater flexibility of analysis (Holmes and Armstrong,1978), thus rejecting the second innovation. Initially commending the abolition of the semi-skilled category by virtue of historical justification; the role of researchers' subjective judgements and decisions in assigning people to the lower class categories was questioned,. because of doubts as to the comparability of different studies. Overall, the criticism of this alternative scheme was that Royle was "looking to the social classification as a 'deus ex machine', and that in rejecting the 1951 Registrar-General's scheme (i.e. Armstrong's) he may be throwing out the baby with the bath-water" (Holmes and Armstrong,1978). It is difficult to state convincingly what is the correct judgement of Royle's scheme, this is a consequence of the very small amount of studies undertaken using it.

There are two other important classification schemes which merit attention , these are Cowlard and Ward. Cowlard's is probably the most important of the two. He (Cowlard,1979) argued that a method of social stratification should reflect as closely as possible that perceived by contemporaries, and also distinguish between the many subtle levels of status within the "continuity of status in Victorian society" (Cowlard,1979). To ensure the success of these goals, households with similar lifestyles, though not necessarily of the same political

allegiances or class consciousness are grouped together. Occupation was seen as the single most visual indicator of lifestyle; but it was necessary to use additional indicators of status, such as: servant keeping; lodge-keeping, etc. These additional indicators were used promote or relegate individuals between several sub-classes of Armstrong's five main classes. The use of the additional indications allowed consideration of the entire family allowed subtleties within one class to appear.. The scheme was successfully tested for Wakefield in 1851, but not anywhere else.

Ward offered a clasification which was tailor-made to suit the urban industrial society of Leeds in the mid-nineteenth-century (Word,1980). The value of this classification is difficult to comprehend because it has not been utilised anywhere else besides Leeds. This lack of comparability, a consequence of its tailor-made nature will doubtless hinder further use. There are several other methodologies which have been used for the social stratification of occupations. These vary from: three classes based upon the 1841 Census of Ireland (Martin,1973); to a five class scheme of farmers, tradesmen, textile workers and lower classes in mid-nineteenth century Liverpool (Dennis,1977); through an eight class model for London (Woods,1984); and lastly seven class a classifications for Victorian Ontario (Katz,1969) and Toronto (Goheen,1980). All of these have only been utilised once and vary in usefulness; they are not as valuable as the major alternatives because they exclude additional factors such as servant keeping as extra indications to help the determination of the status of occupations.

Though there appears to be "as many views of social class and as many ingenuous methods of classification as there are sociologists; does appear to be generally agreed that the most useful piece of information to have about a man to place him in a social context, is to know what sort of job he does" (Rosser and Harris,1965). The validity of this statement is not questioned, nor is the value of using Armstrong's scheme for the social classification of occupations. The limitations and problems inherent within the scheme have to be borne in mind if it is to be utilised as an analytical tool to reveal the wealth of information within the census data to the researcher. This classification merits the attention upon it because it underpins much of the historico-socio-geographic research undertaken in Britain and Ireland. The user of the classification must remain cognisant at all times of its limits and capabilities; because "the choice of an

occupational classification partly determines the patterns of social stratification found" (Katz,1972). Not withstanding some of its defects the classification scheme of Armstrong for the status of occupations has "tended to be adapted 'faite de mienx', partly because of convenience and partly because it permits comparability between studies" (Holmes and Armstrong,1978). Problems may be overcome by scrutinising individuals and using judgement; "prospective users should not be deterred by the exchanges and clashes of opinions about its exploitation which are needed" (Armstrong,1968). If debate on the classification allows doubt to develop about its value, the "nagging suspicion that is perhaps injudicious to put too much weight on occupation in attempting a social classification" (Holmes and Armstrong,1978) may occur. Despite this thought, occupation is perhaps the only very few personal indication which can go some way to providing the elusive solution to the search for the 'perfect' methodology to help the revelation of the past as it really was.

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