



## Social Class and the Cultural Turn

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# Social class and the cultural turn: Anthropology, sociology and the post-industrial politics of 21st century Britain

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## Abstract

The social science of the contemporary moment in Britain, and Europe, requires an interdisciplinary and ethnographic study of social class. The time is ripe for a mutually critical conversation between sociology and anthropology about the cultural turn in the study of social class. This matters, because the cultural turn in the social sciences must be adequate to the task of charting the potential threat to progressive society posed by the cultural turn in the general population and in politics. The political vacuum in post-industrial cities has led to emergent forms of cultural nationalism that flirt with fascism and give rise to a populist challenge to the political establishment and the cohesion of a class-based configuration of collective action under the conditions of advanced capitalism.

## Keywords

anthropology, Bourdieu, Britain, culture, ethnicity, France, post-industrial, race, social class

... one cannot fully understand cultural practices unless ‘culture’ in the restricted, normative sense of ordinary usage, is bought back into ‘culture’ in the anthropological sense.

(Bourdieu, 1984, p. xxiv)

It is now our urgent task to engage fascism as it unfolds on a human scale, in a language that is eerily familiar, in the crosscurrents of daily life, and in the jarring interplay of what Michael Herzfeld refers to as ‘cultural intimacy’.

(Holmes, 2016, p. 3)

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## Introduction

The ongoing cultural turn in British sociology (Devine, Savage, Scott, & Crompton, 2005), and the increasing focus, in social anthropology, on the study of Britain (Rapport, 2002), make pertinent a renewed conversation between sociology and anthropology about shared matters of concern. At a time, globally, when religion, ethnicity and culture are increasingly foregrounded as the explicit means for new kinds of political mobilization, whilst social class and race are obscured and made taboo (Edwards, Evans, & Smith, 2012; Evans, 2012a; Geschiere, 2009; Gingrich & Banks, 2006; Gustafson, 2009; Kalb & Halmai, 2011; Trigger & Dalley, 2010), there is good reason to focus on the cultural means for reconfiguring social landscapes, but room too for caution. This is because the religious, ethnic and cultural work that is currently transforming sociality, and politics, risks obscuring the continuity of economic and racial inequality (Back & Solomos, 1995; Hewitt, 2005; Holmes, 2000; Kalb & Carrier, 2015; Narotsky, 2015).

Of particular relevance to a shared interdisciplinary conversation about the cultural turn, despite ongoing arguments that the contemporary moment is suggestive of increasing individualization, and, therefore, the redundancy of class analysis (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1990), is a persistent, if transforming preoccupation with studying social class in Britain (Crompton, 2008; Devine et al., 2005; Edwards et al., 2012; Savage, 2015). Crompton, for example, argues that despite a need to focus on contemporary processes of individualization (2008, pp. 149–150) and lifestyle choice, this must not lead to a neglect of the study of the ongoing structures of class-based inequality, especially when it is becoming clear that inequalities are increasingly pronounced because of the economic and political effects of neoliberalism. At stake is the broader, substantive and theoretical project of describing and analysing the relationship between economy, social structure and cultural value in contemporary capitalism (Crompton & Scott, 2005; Kalb & Carrier, 2015; Wright, 2015). My argument is that this project of description and analysis is best served by a combination of sociological and anthropological studies of social class in Britain. This requires a mutually critical interdisciplinary conversation, which I attempt here, but that, for the most part, is not yet a regular occurrence. Hence, the timeliness of this monograph issue, which follows on from earlier work on the anthropology of Britain (Rapport, 2002), and which is a provocation to debate, amongst other things, on the contemporary significance of individual choice/differentiation, in contrast to the ongoing collective significance of structural inequalities such as social class.

I approach this interdisciplinary conversation by suggesting that a productive way to make sense of the different approaches, in anthropology and sociology (and within sociology itself), to the study of social class in Britain is through an analysis of the different inspirations derived from the varying approaches to the study of social and cultural life of the French anthropologist/sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (Reed-Danahay, 2005). My argument is that the significant difference lies in the shift that took place between Bourdieu's more anthropological approach, in his earlier work in Algeria (1963, 1966), which was theorized in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), and the transition to a more obviously sociological position in his later work on France (1984). I use this focus on the different approaches within Bourdieu's work, and the various uses of it, as a way to critique a certain aspect of the cultural turn in sociology, especially as it manifests in

the recent Great British Class Survey. I then relate this critique to what I understand to be the pressing priority of our time, which is for social scientists to be able to work together to explain the contemporary moment in Europe. These are times in which increasing economic inequality, the post-industrial abandonment of the working classes, the resultant ‘middle classification of Britain’ (Edwards et al., 2012) and the turn to new and more palatable forms of cultural nationalism – such as that espoused by the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and the Front National in France – are leading to the threat of increasingly fractured nation-states, divided along racial, ethnic and religious lines.

In my own work (Evans, 2012a) I have shown how, in England, at the beginning of the 21st century, the growing popularity of far-right cultural nationalism was to be understood not just as a transformation of class and racial politics, but also as the extreme expression of increasing economic inequality in post-industrial cities. I explained the short-lived political success of the British National Party (BNP) in terms of its campaign for cultural solidarity around the idea of a newly defined ethnic (i.e. white) Englishness. The relative popularity of this strategy signified the alienation of left-wing white working class voters from a Labour movement that had once been expressive of solidarity with the economic struggles of a (multi-racial) workforce inhabiting the nation’s former industrial heartlands. The protest of these traditional working class voters was against New Labour, which was now perceived to be mainly preoccupied with courting big business, and the middle classes, whilst supporting multiculturalism, and the drive to individual self-sufficiency.

Against the background of a perceived abandonment of the ‘white’ working classes by the political establishment, the political manoeuvres of the BNP were to be understood, therefore, as a populist attempt to reconfigure working class politics. The ambition was to divide the working classes amongst themselves and, by turning the relative success of multiculturalism in Britain on its head, to use the language of ethnicity and culture to accentuate racial differences in the population as a whole. By attempting to claim a cultural high ground for the neglected ‘indigenous’ people of Britain, the BNP attempted to inculcate a sense of ethnic entitlement as the means for white working class people in the most impoverished neighbourhoods of post-industrial England to reclaim a sense of dignity in the face of a heightened sense of insecurity and injustice in the struggle for survival. Thus, the increasing economic inequalities experienced by everyone – black, white and Asian – living in these neighbourhoods were reconfigured by the far-right as the specifically cultural battles of white residents to compete for scarce resources against black and Asian outsiders/immigrants.

I explained (Evans, 2012a) how this trend towards an increasing ‘ethnicization’ of Britain was to be understood in relation to Europe, where various movements of far-right cultural nationalism were turning ideas about postcolonial resistance on their head. In Europe too, increasing economic inequality was leading to an illiberal populist reaction from below. Political arguments in the form of scaremongering about non-white immigration were leading to claims of special cultural privilege for ‘indigenous’, supposedly ‘autochthonous’ (white) citizens. And it was important to point out that this racial reconfiguration of the politics of the working class was a reversal of what was happening elsewhere, around the world, in places where indigenous movements were successfully using the same strategies, but for opposite effect. For example, far-left postcolonial

populist projects of cultural nationalism in regions like Latin America were increasingly effective in replacing the categorical solidarity forged by discourses of race and class, with a post-Marxist politics of ethnic mobilization around the concept of (non-white) indigeneity. Thus, whatever is to be understood by our own cultural turn in the social sciences, it must be equal to the task of tracking, commenting upon and challenging the manifold versions of the work that culture is being mobilized to do in the social and political landscape of contemporary Britain, Europe and the world.

### **‘Cultural intimacies’**

In a recent article in *Anthropology Today*, Douglas Holmes (2016) sounded the alarm about the cultural turn in the politics of the far-right in Europe. Moving beyond his previous reticence to use the term fascism, he urged anthropologists to pay greater attention to the ways in which everyday ‘cultural intimacies’ are becoming the means for the expression of an exclusionist solidarity that is reconfiguring the very idea of society. In Britain, this means that anthropologists, and sociologists, must continue to attend, ethnographically, to the ways in which the transformations of the far-right become more mainstream through a constant cultural adjustment that conceals both the economic origins of extreme inequality (Degnen, 2012; Edwards et al., 2012; Koch, 2015; Mollona, 2009; Rhodes, 2011; Smith, 2012) and the movement towards the centre ground of a populist, and increasingly illiberal, anti-Europe, anti-immigrant stance (Martin & Smith, 2014; Skey, 2011). Also important is recent anthropological work that focuses on the racial and ethnic prejudices of the white middle classes, and challenges the misguided popular idea that racism is the preserve of the white working classes in the UK (Tyler K., 2004, 2012a, 2012b, 2015).

Ironically, the reconfiguration of the far-right in Britain relies on a continued rejection of multiculturalism whilst mobilizing the intimate struggles of cultural politics for very different ends. By the end of the first decade of the 21st century, it had become clear, in England, that the decline of the BNP, which was eventually defeated by a grassroots resurgence of old-style Labour politics at a localized level of activism, was likely to contribute to a worrying reconfiguration of the right-wing in British politics (Ford & Goodwin, 2014). Already, those older, male, white working class voters in the south and east of the country, who had always voted Conservative, were becoming disillusioned with what they perceived to be a growing disconnection between ordinary people and a political, self-serving elite in Westminster (Ford & Goodwin, 2014). They had begun to switch their allegiance to UKIP, the right-wing, populist, UK Independence Party, which campaigns as an anti-elitist, radically anti-European, anti-immigration, libertarian (i.e. anti-state), nationalist party.

As the influence of the BNP collapsed, UKIP was keen to extend its influence beyond marginal Conservative seats in the south and east of the country, and to begin campaigning in former Labour post-industrial heartlands where the BNP had previously enjoyed a measure of success. Not surprisingly, the unprecedented rise in popularity of the party caused a stir in the political establishment. In May 2014, UKIP won a historic victory in the European Elections, securing 24 of 73 seats, showing successes in every region of the country, and making it the first time in a hundred years that a non-Labour and

non-Conservative party had won a national election. Most significant about this turning point in UK politics (Ford & Goodwin, 2014) was the threat posed by UKIP, because it was successfully bringing together, across the political divide, older, white, more well to do working class men from both Conservative and Labour persuasions.

Nigel Farage, leader of UKIP, was keen to distance himself from the racism of the far-right BNP, and, in the manner of the political sanitization of the Front National in France, he knew that the legitimacy of his party depended on cleaning up the public reputation of his members and politicians who were renowned for their shockingly illiberal outbursts. Constantly having to distance himself from those in UKIP who expressed extreme racist or homophobic views, Farage was, himself, under the spotlight for a range of anti-immigrant remarks that made his appeal to former supporters of the BNP comprehensible.

Farage emphasized that his version of nationalism was not like the 'blood and soil' nationalism of the BNP. Rather, he asserted a civic nationalism that allowed anyone, regardless of racial or religious background, who 'identifies with Britain' to be part of the nation. Exactly what it means to 'identify' with the 'majority culture' of Britain was purposefully unclear, but the party manifesto spoke volumes. It was blatantly anti-cultural and anti-immigration, and the political significance of race was cleverly disguised, because there was no longer any need for the ethnic and cultural claim so emphasized by the BNP; the latter had already done all the work of making an anti-immigration stance on the right, stand for, and potently symbolize, the ethnic and cultural cohesion of British nationalism. Nigel Farage was running with the imagery that the BNP had lent to the idea of immigration; it had now become a heavily loaded and deeply symbolic term. Just to speak of anti-immigration from a Euro-sceptic position, was to point to the desire for a reversal of the erosion of 'common heritage' implied by rising racial and ethnic diversity in Britain.

What matters is that these very different expressions of the cultural turn in contemporary politics are understood as varying responses to the same global process of USA-inspired economic transformation in which, ideally, capitalism is freed from constraint, and government is released from a social contract that entails provision of public service and support for the most vulnerable people in society (Wacquant, 2012). It is vital, therefore, that neither sociology nor anthropology is blindsided by any of the variations of a neoliberal contract that makes ethnicity and culture the handmaidens of an economic ideology which fosters individual self-realization, and cultural affiliation, at the expense of other, more recognizable kinds of critical solidarity (Crompton & Scott, 2005; Gustafson, 2009; Hale, 2006; Kalb & Carrier, 2015; Wacquant, 2012). In other words, a turn towards culture in the social sciences must not sacrifice a preoccupation with political economy in terms of what is to be understood about the global condition of advanced capitalism (Kalb & Carrier, 2015; Rojek & Turner, 2000).

## **All things Bourdieusian**

As an anthropologist, part of what interests me about the cultural turn in sociology, and in particular when applied to the study of social class, is the question of what counts for sociologists as the domain of 'the cultural'. In the quote that opens this article, Bourdieu

draws attention to the difference between the anthropological use of the term (which suggests an attentiveness to the totality of lived experience as wholly cultural, i.e. affected, through and through, by historically specific, collectively distinctive values) and the everyday marking out of a specialized domain of ‘normative’ culture, hereafter referred to as Culture (with a capital C). This normative idea of Culture, which is often divided between High Brow/Haute Bourgeois, Middle Brow/Moyenne Bourgeois (as the elite, dominant, upper, upper-middle and middle class forms) and Popular Culture (as the majority, working class forms), attributes a special importance to ‘The Arts’ in the broadest sense, including music and the theatre, such that the notions of what counts as Art, and what counts as Culture, become inseparable.

Ideally, Bourdieu is suggesting (1984, p. xxiv), the study of Culture in sociology needs to be situated, anthropologically, in relation to the totality of cultural values, which suffuse everyday life. This means that in any one nation, such as France, cultural values are to be understood as the whole diverse set of everyday ideals towards which the various social practices of collectively distinctive persons are oriented. This whole is to be understood in contrast to what is singled out as being worthy of special Cultural distinction, and rendered normative, and superior, through the constant repetition and validation of what counts as a dominant style. The interesting question then becomes one of how it is that what counts as properly Cultural activity is constituted in relation to highly specialized domains, or social fields, that separate, and mark out as distinctive, the particularity and peculiarity of bourgeois tastes. Part of Bourdieu’s argument is that in France (as elsewhere in the history of the modernizing world), the process of imposing a nationalized education on the population leads to the learning, and legitimization – as if it were naturally superior – of European Bourgeois Culture as a particular set of aesthetic sensibilities, standing apart from what becomes, in contradistinction, the commonplace appreciation of ordinary life. His argument is that the highly specific kind of knowledge that this form of education gives rise to (especially when combined with a cumulative, taken-for-granted, intergenerational sensibility to what counts as European Bourgeois Culture within ‘well educated’, professional families) makes of Bourgeois Culture a kind of currency that can be exchanged, or made to stand for – to symbolize – personal value, as if Culture were a form of capital unto itself. It then becomes fascinating, as British feminist sociologists such as Skeggs (1997, 2004, 2005) and Lawler (2000, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2013) have done, to consider how, under what conditions and with what effects ‘Cultural Capital’ becomes translatable in economic terms, and transactable in the specific kinds of exchanges, and strategic games, which constitute prosperity as a symbolic force that makes wealth recognizable, and sustainable, for certain categories of persons, and not for others.

From this perspective, a perspective that is concerned to show how Culture is marked out as a separate subset of the whole set of social life, and cultural value in France (and by implication in any modern society), it is clear that part of Bourdieu’s intention was to bring sociology closer to anthropology. This makes it all the more important to understand why, in some respects, he failed to do this. In Bourdieu’s later work, such as *Distinction*, he describes his research as an ‘ethnography of France’ (1984, p. xi), but the research leaves behind the methodological commitment to in-depth participant observation, which is implied in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, and it cannot, therefore, be



categorized, at least from an anthropological perspective, as an ethnographic project. This begs the question not only of what necessarily constitutes an ethnographic approach to the study of social life (Evans, 2012b), but also of what kind of analytical purchase Bourdieu hoped to lend to the work by describing it as an ‘ethnography’, and by situating his approach as being in sympathy with anthropology.

The effect, I would argue, is twofold. First, it creates the impression of an analogy between *Outline of a Theory of Practice* and *Distinction* – a continuity of approach – that allows for the impression of the application of the theory of habitus to the study of France. Second, it creates an implicit analogy between France and Algeria. This is because the cultivation of aesthetic judgement/bourgeois distinction amongst the French is revealed as a fundamental cultural value expressive of social class as one of the ordering principles of the capitalist hierarchy that is French society, just as amongst the Kabyle in Algeria, honour is understood, in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, to be a primary cultural orientation, which is expressive of a specific peasant sensibility. The theoretical point is significant: it is as much as to say that social scientists require a theory for understanding the relationship between the mode of production, social structure and cultural value, and once they have it, it can be applied, for cross-cultural purposes, to any society.

As Reed-Danahay argues (2005), the analogy, in Bourdieu’s work, between Algeria and France is important for several reasons. This is not just because of the colonial relation itself, or a history of Algerian migration to France, which poses a continuous challenge to the postcolonial present in France, and that ought, therefore, to be the focus of sustained sociological, and anthropological, attention (Keaton, 2006; Silverstein, 2004), but also because the empathy of Bourdieu for the sensibility of the mountain peasant, in Algeria, is derived from his own biography, growing up in the context of the mountainous region of southwestern France, in Bern. There, a rural peasant existence was transformed, during Bourdieu’s lifetime, by the modernizing force of the French project of a standardizing nationalization centred on the economic and cultural values of the Parisian elite.

Experiencing for himself the ‘symbolic violence’ of the French education system, as an initiation into the dominant Bourgeois Culture of France (of which, as Chair of Sociology at Ecoles des Haute Etudes, he became a grand master), Bourdieu, by focusing, in *Distinction*, on the core values at the heart of the bourgeois sensibility, takes the opportunity to make a profound political point: he highlights the implications of this normative educational project of bourgeois-ification for all that is marginal to that system of value, including to some extent his own peasant sensibility, and later, in the *Weight of the World*, the increasingly marginalized urban poor of France.

Bourdieu’s appeal to an ethnographic framing of the cultural analysis of France, in *Distinction*, lends theoretical weight to the claims of his argument that social structures are embodied as a set of ‘relatively stable dispositions’ (1984, p. 506) – action schema – that are largely unconscious, taken-for-granted orientations towards a social world experienced in terms of a deeply felt sensibility towards the realization of certain life strategies and end goals. The political implication is important, because in revealing to the French what they take for granted, which is a habitual attitude that legitimizes Bourgeois Culture, as the ‘natural’, dominant expression of social class distinction, and proper personhood, the question immediately arises of what this process of legitimization means for the majority of the population whose symbolic distance from the ideals of

French Cultural values has potentially alienating psychic consequences. It is this aspect of Bourdieu's political project that has been so central to the research of ethnographically inspired sociologists (Adkins & Skeggs, 2004; Charlesworth, 2000; McKenzie, 2015; Skeggs, 1997, 2004, 2007; Tyler I., 2013; Walkerdine, 2001).

The problem, however, precisely because the research in *Distinction* is not ethnographic, is that the use of the social survey method has the unintended consequence of elaborating upon the project of the legitimization of Bourgeois Culture, and of lending to the set of social fields in which this process of legitimization plays out, the discipline of sociology (as evidenced in the social survey method) as another kind of bourgeois aesthetic, whose gaze on the world cannot help but act out in practice the symbolic violence of a scheme of class-ification, which renders invisible the sociality and rich cultural life of the French working classes. In other words, because of the problem of method in *Distinction*, the problem of bourgeois-ification in France is made worse, and, as a result, the political power of the analysis is diminished. Furthermore, this same problem has been imported to Britain, because of the attempt in British sociology to apply to the British case Bourdieu's method of measuring social class as sets of Cultural capitals (Bennett et al., 2009). As a consequence, the symbolic violence of the social survey method is, ironically, undermining of the sociological attempt to revitalize, for good political reasons, the study of social class in Britain (Mills, 2014).

## Culture and the ethnographers

Whereas earlier conversations between anthropology and sociology about social life in Britain were particularly fruitful (Macdonald, Edwards, & Savage, 2005), it appears that apart from a shared ethnographic preoccupation, especially amongst feminist sociologists, with how differences of social class in the UK are lived and experienced in practice, there is a generally distant relationship between the disciplines of anthropology and sociology. This is partly to do with institutional arrangements that make experiments in interdisciplinarity difficult to sustain in the contemporary higher educational environment (Macdonald et al., 2005, p. 594). It is also to do with, on the one hand, a serious lack in social anthropology (compared to sociology) of systematic attention to the theorization of class, with a typical over-reliance on the in-depth value of localized case studies (Kalb & Carrier, 2015), and, on the other hand, methodological innovations in sociology that put the study of 'lifestyle' choices at the centre of one kind of approach to the new focus on social class (Bennett et al., 2009; Devine et al., 2005). The problem with this is the sacrifice it entails of the study of meaning, and everyday social practices – as lived experiences – to a preoccupation with cultural measurement, narrowly defined, as an index of social structure. For anthropologists, the cultural measurement/survey method approach to the study of social class rings alarm bells, because it has the effect of a troubling de-contextualization, which has been imported from French sociology via the cult in a certain kind of British sociology for all things Bourdieusian.

Attentiveness, amongst anthropologists, to the conceptual mobilization of the category of culture arises, partly, because there is significant scepticism amongst us that our specialist focus is best described as the study of culture – as opposed to sociality (Baumann, 1996; Evans, 2010; James, Toren, & Plaise, 2010; Kuper, 2000) – and partly

because in contemporary times and for various reasons, there is, worldwide, a migration of the concept of culture out of the academy and into common parlance. It is now becoming routine, for example, that anthropologists, as part of their fieldwork research, are having to grapple with the various ways in which their informants now readily make use of the concept of culture for certain kinds of purposes. This might involve the use of the concept to add value to the work of commodification, for example in lending the idea of authenticity to the creation of artefacts in Africa that will be desired by middle class European consumers (Held & Moore, 2008). Or, it might involve attentiveness to the ways in which culture is mobilized politically in postcolonial struggles that require the crafting of a timeless, and as if hermetically sealed, indigeneity unsullied by the social history of a globalized, capitalist modernity (Kuper, 2003).

This ethnographic sensibility to the uses of the concept of culture creates a heightened awareness of what difference it makes, either to anthropologists or sociologists, to mobilize the concept for analytical purposes. This leads to an increased curiosity too about what methods make possible the sociological, or anthropological, study of cultural life and also about what the significance might be of the Atlantic divide in anthropology between British Social Anthropology and the more cultural tradition in the USA (Kuper, 2000). The problem, in *Distinction*, is that Bourdieu's ongoing interest in cultural measurement leads to an experiment in the use of the survey method, but without sufficient attention to, and no anthropological caution about the limitations and dangers of the process. Based on a set of questions posed to 1217 subjects, expansive claims are made about national dispositions, and the relative exclusion of certain categories of worker, including the rural farming working classes, is symptomatic of the claim that is made on the basis of the survey data, which is that when it comes to the measurement of Cultural tastes, these kinds of workers are going to be 'uniformly excluded from legitimate culture' (1984, p. 506).

Bourdieu's reflections on method are tucked away in an appendix in *Distinction*, but for an ethnographer, whether sociologist or anthropologist, they are surely part of what is most interesting about the whole book. The problem with the line of questioning is that it is not at all ethnographic. In other words, the questions are loaded, because they assume what counts as Cultural knowledge, and do not attempt to find out either for the working class or middle class subjects what counts as cultural understanding for them. The point is that the project itself does in practice what it is trying to investigate: it marks out as legitimately Cultural those categories of aesthetic attention in art and music and other leisure activities that are taken for granted as tasteful pursuits by the French bourgeoisie.

This explains one aspect of the critical reaction to the recent BBC Great British Class Survey (Savage et al., 2013) in Britain, in which it became clear that responding to the sociological survey was becoming the means, amongst a self-selected sample of the wealthy elite, for the celebration of its Cultural status. Not surprisingly, because the data were derived from a BBC online survey, the questionnaire, like Bourdieu's earlier survey in France, gave the sociologists little access to any information about the social and cultural lives of the working or non-working classes. The survey asked of the British public, 'Which Class Are You?' But, because the kind of people who responded to the surveys were exactly the kind of people for whom the questions were least alienating, and most

affirming of their cultural tastes, the survey might more accurately have demanded of its respondents, just as Bourdieu had unintentionally done before, in France, 'Just How Middle Class Are You?' No surprise, then, that this framing of a competitive hierarchy within the middle class set off a chain reaction in response to the publication of the survey results (and the launch online of a new BBC 'class calculator'), as respondents appeared to hurriedly engage in activities that might reinforce their sense of Cultural distinction.

Despite the interesting data that it generated about the middle classes, including their reaction to findings from social surveys about them, and the timely focus on both the growth of extreme inequality and the reconfiguration of class distinctions in Britain, the problem with the Great British Class Survey is that rather than encouraging the middle classes of Britain to reflect politically on the narrow framing of their idea of what it means to be 'properly cultural' in the UK, it encouraged a kind of Cultural feeding frenzy. Via the collusion of an inadequately critical, and arguably predominantly middle class media, the game of Culture was revealed in a survey that emphasized the symbolic value of disposable income, which was to be displayed at all costs. Essentially, this took the form of a lifestyle competition for the best (theatre) seats in the house.

An awareness of the ways in which collaborations between national media and social science can exacerbate, rather than explain, the social and cultural dynamics of inequality (Lawler, 2002, 2005; Tyler I., 2008; Tyler K., 2015), even as these exacerbations produce new forms of discursive data for analysis, is particularly important in the present moment when the transformation of economy and politics, in Britain, has led either to a demonization/demise of the working classes (Jones, 2012; Todd, 2015), or an unintentional reinforcement of the idea that culture, and not social class, is the new way for people living in poverty to best understand, and to strategize effectively about, the relative inequality of their circumstances (Evans, 2012a). The danger is that what gets entirely missed by this Bourdieusian social survey method approach (which implicitly ties what can count as Cultural capital exclusively to the middle and upper classes) is the full potential of what a commitment to an ethnographic approach, either in sociology or anthropology, would imply, which is a long-term period of participant observation that would indirectly ask of working class people, in relation to their taken-for-granted, actual lived experience, 'how is social and cultural life lived and understood by you?' Hence, the critique of the Great British Class Survey, from the perspective of a commitment to ethnography in sociology, insists on a relational perspective that studies social life in practice, because 'it is the ability to define what value *is* (through culture) that is the ultimate difference in politics and power' (Skeggs, 2015, p. 205).

Furthermore, even for those middle class respondents in Bourdieu's survey who were able to confidently answer the rather absurd, de-contextualized questions about Art and Culture in *Distinction*, there is absolutely no sense, in the analysis, of what those responses might mean, or how those responses relate in any way to actual participation/social practice in the social fields where taking a position in the game of Culture becomes constitutive of middle class status. In other words, Bourdieu's analysis of French Culture is not very cultural at all. It is flawed in all the ways that structuralist analyses of social life were flawed before. This arguably structuralist move (Boyne, 2002), away from ethnography, and towards social survey as a method for cultural measurement, obscures,

even in Bourdieu's more obviously political work, *The Weight of the World*, the potential of long-term participant observation fieldwork either in anthropology, or feminist ethnography in sociology, to reveal the unpredictable cultural logics of lives whose social dynamics are excluded, by definition, from the transactions in which cultural value becomes translatable as capital.

## Problems of cultural distinction

Similarly problematic, and also telling of how it is that social science can itself substantiate the exclusionary practices of the bourgeoisie it is trying to study, is the exclusion from Bourdieu's analysis of the French Cultural disposition of the relevance of issues to do with race, religion, or ethnicity. The first survey he conducted for *Distinction* was carried out in 1963, in the immediate aftermath of Algerian independence, and the earlier independence movements in French West Africa and Asia. The significance of the post-colonial moment would certainly not have been lost on Bourdieu, in part because of his work in Algeria, but the omission of the question of what it meant for the cultural landscape of France, in the early 1960s, that France was a multi-racial, multi-ethnic and, therefore, multicultural nation (even though a wartime history of fascism made it impossible to develop a comfortable public discourse about these things), made the investigation of the bourgeoisie, and its narrow Cultural proclivities, implicitly to do with racial classification as much as it was about the categorization of social class. It became clear, by definition, that the bourgeois-ification of France was a *white* middle and upper class (and implicitly Catholic) affair. This makes an important political statement, but one whose power is diminished, not just because the white-ness of the middle class was not referred to specifically in *Distinction*, but because of the more general failure to account, ethnographically, for how the social and cultural specificity of France, and the meaning of French life, was changing radically in the 1960s, because of the transformation of everyday life arising out of the negotiation, with the migrants of former colonies, of what it means to be French. This matters in the contemporary moment, because recent events in Paris (the terrorist attacks of November 2015 and the riots in 2010 and 2005) demonstrate that the nationalist project in France is failing, and that it is failing in part because it has been too culturally narrow.

This limitation reflects, too, the history of a narrow framing of the anthropological project in France (Fassin, 2013), where the object of attention has been too fixated on the traditional exoticism of the discipline, which posited the subjects of former colonies as its object of study, and failed to see, on equal terms, the opportunity, in France, for both the ethnographic study of postcolonial migration and the investigation of the social practices of the metropolitan white middle and upper classes, rather than a romanticization, through ethnological and folkloric studies of a threatened rural existence, of what it means to be French. This problem is a current topic of discussion in the social sciences in France (Bouvier, 1995, 2000; Chevalier, 2015; Rogers, 2001), and the interdisciplinary conversation there between sociology and anthropology might be an interesting point of comparison for the kind of discussions that could emerge in the UK.

Not surprisingly, the culturally narrow framing of the nationalist project in France has given rise to a profound sense of alienation for a significant proportion of the population

(Fassin, 2013). Part of the problem with the Great British Class Survey is that it reproduces this problematic whitening of the middle class, because in its Great British-ness (Savage, 2015, p. 14), it has not captured, due to the limitations of the sample, any sense of how social class, race, religion, gender, age and ethnicity intersect in Britain, or what that intersection might mean to people.

Thus, in the same way that Bourdieu moved away from 'structuralism' in anthropology (1977), because its analyses were too objective, too abstract and too far removed from the flesh and blood concepts that organize people's actual social practice, sociologists of Britain also began to explore the middle ground between objective description and subjective experience of society defined by the stratifications of social class. In other words, a cultural approach to the study of social class became interested to investigate, ethnographically, how people live, and make sense in practice of the particular kind of hierarchy that characterizes a capitalist economy. In this kind of work, because it is ethnographic, it is impossible to avoid the 'intersectionality' (Collins, 2009; McCall, 2005) of social class, as it is lived and indexed through the experience of other kinds of categorical social distinctions such as gender, sexuality, race, religion and ethnicity. Here, the productive potential of a sociological conversation with the Anthropology of Britain becomes more obvious, because the early studies of community life (Frankenberg, 1957; Strathern, 1981), and more contemporary neighbourhood/urban studies (Edwards, 2000; Edwards et al., 2012; Evans, 2006; Mollona, 2009; Smith, 2012; Tyler K., 2012b; Wemyss, 2009), have similarly revealed how the differences that we associate with social class are inseparable from the whole of social life, and lived, often in surprising ways, through other conceptual distinctions, including, for example, a deeply felt sense of place and territorial belonging (see Degnen & Tyler, this volume).

Bringing these sociological and anthropological ethnographies of social class in Britain into conversation ought to lead to provocative questions not just about what makes an anthropological analysis distinctive, if sociologists are ethnographers too, but also about the unexamined division, in the Anthropology of Britain (Edwards et al., 2012), between those anthropologists who have traditionally specialized in the study of the Black-British and Asian-British 'communities' formed by migrants from Britain's former colonies (with a concomitant focus on race, religion and ethnicity, see Werbner, this volume), and those who have focused on social class, and especially the working classes. What becomes interesting, in relation to the latter question, is the different ways in which an anthropological focus on cultural values emerges in relation to the racial, ethnic and religious preoccupations of 'multiculturalism', compared to the ways that the cultural turn in the study of social class emerges from a sociological attentiveness to what counts in Britain as Culture. Although it is precisely these kinds of divisions between an anthropological study of ethnicity and the sociological study of class that a now established body of largely ethnographic work conducted by sociologists (e.g. Alexander, 2000; Ali, 2003; Back, 1996; Bryne, 2006; Hewitt, 2005; Rhodes, 2011), geographers (e.g. Nayak, 2003) and anthropologists (e.g. Tyler K., 2012a; Wemyss, 2009; Wessendorf, 2014) within the field of race and ethnicity studies attempts to bridge.

## Conclusion

I have argued here that a significant shift is taking place in the cultural politics of the UK (and Europe); this shift is characterized by what I have described as a combination of the ‘middle class-ification’ of Britain, and the reconfiguration of the politics of the traditional working classes in terms of a narrow version of cultural nationalism, which is fuelling a new and, apparently, more palatable version of the far-right. I have expressed concern about how the social sciences in Britain (and Europe) are responding to this shift in cultural politics, warning that there is a danger that the importation to the UK of an obsession with all things Bourdieusian in British sociology is leading to the kinds of analyses, and media collaborations, that function, despite best intentions, to lend weight to the project of middle class-ification rather than to adequately critique it. Whilst this social survey based sociology is described as part of the cultural turn in sociology, I have argued that it risks – because of its own narrow cultural framing – missing the cultural turn that is already taking hold in everyday life in Britain. This is a cultural turn that reduces the complexity of racial and ethnic distinctions in the working class to a narrow cultural and nationalist preoccupation with ‘majority culture’.

I have suggested that a way out of this problem is to emphasize the ethnographic study of everyday sociality and politics in Britain, and that this ethnographic project of rendering complexity political is an urgent task in the contemporary moment. It also means that whatever is to be understood by our own cultural turn in the social sciences, it must be equal to the task of tracking, commenting upon and challenging the manifold versions of the work that culture is being mobilized to do in the social and political landscape of contemporary Britain, and Europe. My argument is that only the combined project of a sociology and anthropology of Britain that focuses on the ethnographic study of the social practices and lived experiences of advanced capitalism, and the transformations of post-industrial political economy, is equal to the urgent task of tackling and commenting critically on an increasingly unequal society. This is a society that celebrates the cultural status of the middle class whilst imagining that it is possible to eliminate the political and economic significance of the working classes through a combination of Cultural obfuscation and a disguised, ethnically based nationalism, which is slowly reconfiguring the collectives that once defined a radical politics of resistance in Britain (and Europe).

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