Ethnicity and Social Divisions
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FOREWORD

The newly elected government, which came into office in Sweden in 1991, found that Swedish research would profit from more and better international contacts. In consequence it announced a grant for cooperation of Swedish universities with eminent international ones. The Swedish Institute for Social Research (SOFI) and the sociology department at Stockholm University had for many years had close links to Nuffield College, Oxford University (John Goldthorpe; Anthony Heath) and to the Department of Sociology at Harvard (Lee Rainwater; Aage Sørensen). On the basis of these connections we applied for support and received a fairly generous grant, which provided us with the possibility to start cooperating in more organised forms. Later this cooperation turned into meetings of graduate students from the three universities, which were held nearly every year. After his early decease in the midst of a highly successful career, the series of meetings was named after Aage Sørensen, for his important role at the start of the series. The grant expired but the series of meetings continued, as is obvious from this volume of contributions at the tenth and eleventh conferences.

The concept for these meetings may be unique, as there are probably few similar series in the world. I also believe that it is a worthwhile effort. As is true for established researchers, the possibility to meet associates from other universities can provide graduate students with new insights, ideas and connections, and be of value in their scientific development. I actually believe that the possibilities offered by this programme are of special value. Why should this be the case?

To me it seems quite clear that if we with sociology mean what is taught and studied at sociology departments around the world, sociology is a divided discipline. I am certain that if sociology students at one Swedish university would sit an exam given to sociology students at some other university – in Sweden or elsewhere – they would do much worse than would be the case for students in other social sciences, at least compared to those in economics.

Thus, various forms of intellectual activity run under the name of sociology. This is certainly not a new phenomenon. C. Wright Mills
(1959) characterised sociological practice at Harvard and Columbia in the 1950s as Grand Theory and Abstracted Empiricism, respectively. My impression, though, is that the division has become deeper. That is, to stick to my operational definition, I believe that students some fifty years ago would have done better on other departments’ exams than would be the case today. This is partly due to varying effects of prevailing ideologies, that is, the now perhaps fading influence of Marxism and the present strong influence of feminism in some departments but not in other ones.

Important for the split may be where sociology teachers find the essence of the subject; middle range theories and quantitative methods, globalisation and world system theories, cultural studies and qualitative methods, etc etc. The ‘cultural turn’ seems to have had a profound influence on some practitioners of the subject but certainly less on others and social constructivism seems in some circles to be the appropriate standpoint on the philosophy of science.

My own view of good sociology is based on a basically Popperian understanding of science and I must admit that I have great difficulties in accepting some varieties in which great statements are made without a sign of empirical support, and sometimes without even the possibility of finding such support. For some sociologists ‘social theory’ seems to mean the explication of concepts and elaborations of taxonomies, which by definition are neither true nor false.

In too many areas of sociology we find theories and hypotheses, whose empirical testability is uncertain and sometimes non-existent. I expect that such theories will in the long run be forgotten, not because they are falsified by empirical observations, but because they will come out of fashion.

Some practitioners keep with the old fashions while others quickly move on to new ones and falsification only works in the long run – if accepted at all – so in the short run we have a discipline in which we may agree on the central object of study but not on the theoretical approach to that study.

So, why should my rather gloomy view of sociology at large in any way speak to the advantage of this series of meetings? Actually my view is not so gloomy. I think that much high quality sociological research is conducted presently and that the totality of such research is on the increase, so my view of the development of sociology is rather positive. My impression is that the sociological practice at Harvard, Oxford and Stockholm is part of this positive development, that they are places where
good sociology is produced. The affinity between these departments can perhaps be inferred from the similarity in problem choice and theoretical approach that is evident in the contributions to this book. This series of meetings provides graduate students with the opportunity to meet associates of a similar inclination from first rate departments. This volume exemplifies my belief in the high quality of graduate research at the three departments and is a proof of the value of the series.

Stockholm in October
2007
Robert Erikson

References

This is a compilation of papers drawn from an exciting dialogue at the annual Aage Sørensen Memorial Conferences in 2006 and 2007, comprised of PhD candidates from the Sociology Departments at the universities of Harvard, Oxford and Stockholm who represent a new generation of sociologists. Although those attending the conference were free to contribute papers within all fields of sociology, a significant number chose topics that in one way or another addressed issues concerning ethnicity, “race” and immigration. Furthermore, there were commonalities in the analyses and conceptual terrain: whereas many of the recent studies on ethnicity have tended to emphasize cultural identity and minority rights, the papers in this conference primarily consider ethnicity and its relationship to claims for social equality and opportunities in society. This reflects that a focus on social stratification remains central in sociology and the increasing presence of ethnicity in social analysis.

By integrating ethnicity into a framework of social stratification, we contest the kind of postmodern approaches claiming that class is no longer as relevant a category to understand mechanisms of inequality in contemporary societies, highlighting that class and ethnicity often are interrelated categories in multiethnic societies. Both might indeed function as mechanisms of exclusion; both represent categories of advantage or disadvantage in social life.

This book is intended for students, scholars and others interested in issues of ethnicity, “race” and social stratification in Western societies, as well as in questions of redistribution and social justice. Thus, the issues dealt with in this book have relevance for a wide range of disciplines, including sociology, political science, education and ethnic studies. The editors and contributors were at the time for the 2006 and 2007 Aage Sørensen Memorial Conferences PhD candidates in sociology at Harvard University, Oxford University, or Stockholm University.
Ethnicity appears as an increasingly relevant category of social stratification in contemporary, multiethnic societies. Consequently, a significant part of contemporary sociology does in one way or another deal with issues as ethnic discrimination, racism, ethnic identity, ethnic minority rights, transnational migration and diasporas etcetera. This does not exclude recognizing that class remains crucial to understand inequalities in opportunities and living conditions.

Over the last decades however, the concept of class has often been criticized, questioned and considered out of date in public and political debate as well as social research. Within theoretical discourses as postmodernism and globalisation, emphasis has been on fragmentation as characteristic for the modern world, and what commonly is described as the “cultural turn” within social and political theory has led to an increased focus on particular identities and experiences, political struggles among deprivileged groups who demand recognition of their particularity instead of redistribution of resources, and a critique of claims to universalism (Fraser, 1997; Hobson, 2003). This cultural turn has been strongly felt within fields as social movement theory, post-colonial theory, segments of feminist theory and, not the least, within the field of multiculturalism. The latter has been criticized by, for instance, Barry (2001). He calls for a resurrection of a liberal-egalitarian perspective and warns for a destructive...
focus on difference instead of what we have in common, in times of increasing socio-economic inequalities all over the Western world – inequalities that paradoxically might have particularly severe consequences for immigrants and ethnic minorities, who generally belong to the lowest social strata. Increasing inequality of resources is also emphasized by Crompton (1998), who claims that class is by no means overplayed as a key concept to understand factors as distribution of power, structural inequality and (real and potential) social and political agency, but that it has been considered old-fashioned and irrelevant as it has been unclear what it refers to in contemporary, rapidly changing societies. In her view the class concept thus needs to be reinterpreted to better describe the contemporary social reality.

Even though we restrict our discussion to ethnicity and social class, it is important to point out that class, gender and ethnicity often are interrelated categories. This has recently been emphasized by a number of scholars applying the concept of intersectionality, as de los Reyes and Mulinari (2005) in their call for a critical analysis of power and inequality. Ignoring one or more of these social stratificators might limit the understanding of the phenomenon studied. It may however be difficult to include all aspects, often implying too wide research scopes for single studies. Also, the underlying mechanisms of social stratification tend to be, at least partly, different.

The contributions to this volume primarily focus on ethnic and class-related stratification from different perspectives. The book should thus not be read as an attempt to develop intersectional analysis, but does hopefully lead to new insights in some of the various ways in which inequality along ethnic and socio-economic lines is being reproduced in different fields of society, in this context with a special emphasis on educational institutions. Education is doubtlessly a central arena for determining the individual’s life chances; factors as educational attainment and access to prestigious universities are therefore highly relevant for studies of equality of opportunities.

Before presenting the chapters included in the book, we will discuss the central concepts of ethnicity and class in relation to contemporary theoretical debates. The contributions in this volume address questions of inequality and social stratification in terms of ethnic discrimination (and “self-discrimination”) as well as class-related disadvantage from diverse perspectives. From this viewpoint, we are allowed to interpret a strong
ethnic identity not only as a marker of internal cohesion and cultural security in the ethnic community, but also as a response to lacking opportunities and holding low status in relation to the majority society.

**Ethnicity as a Category of Inequality**

As the Western world started to receive large amounts of immigrants from the post-war era and on, postcolonial nationalism thrived in the aftermath of European dominance, and ethno-national conflicts escalated around the world, social scientists came to develop a growing interest in ethnicity. The interdisciplinary research field of multiculturalism, which we briefly discussed above, has been the main area where this dimension is dealt with, where the focus on ethnicity – generally described as closely related to a people’s culture and traditions – often has coincided with that on identity, particularly in terms of a notion of strong group identities among ethnic minorities (e.g., Taylor, 1994; Kymlicka, 1995; Parekh, 2000).

Several multiculturalist theorists have been criticized from a liberal-egalitarian and feminist perspective for applying a static and conservative view on culture and seeing ethno-cultural communities as harmonic entities, where the emphasis lies on these communities’ rights to maintain their traditions and practices and protect their cultural identity – without recognizing the internal struggles around who defines this “group identity”, and who has to submit to it (Stolcke, 1994; Barry, 2001; Benhabib, 2002; Fraser and Honneth, 2003). Furthermore, ethnicity and culture are concepts that might become even more ambiguous over time in ethnically plural societies. Appiah (2005) argues that what initially is referred to as “immigrants’ culture” (by themselves or by others) tends to become blurred as generations pass by, leading to greater cultural hybridisation and homogenisation between different ethnicities.

Evidently, it is not an easy task to define concepts such as culture, identity and ethnicity – not to mention the controversial notion of “race” (which is a highly contested category in Sweden, while it is more generally accepted and commonly used within the Anglo-Saxon research tradition). Scholars emphasizing ethnicity and cultural identity as fundamental for individuals’ sense of meaning and identification with others are often called strong multiculturalists. They tend to see ethnicity as inherited and deeply rooted in the human character (e.g., Kymlicka, 1995; Parekh, 2000). Others however consider ethnicity to be a fluid concept under constant change and reinterpretation, whose importance might be weakened or
strengthened depending on the external environment. These scholars thus tend to see ethnicity primarily as a social construction (e.g. Barth, 1969; Habermas, 1994). Weber (1978 [1922]: 389) summed up the vagueness of the concept in these words: “The whole conception of ethnic groups is so complex and so vague that it might be good to abandon it altogether.”

We do however consider it relevant to speak of ethnicity and ethnic groups since ethnicity, just as class or gender, appears to be a central category that influences the opportunities people have in society. Just as social theorists might recognize that there is a capitalist order that deprivileges the lower strata of society, and a patriarchal order that deprivileges women, there appears to be an ethnic or “racial” status order that operates world-wide and privileges those considered “white” (de los Reyes and Mulinari, 2005). Being an immigrant, or belonging to an ethnic minority, often means belonging to a category of disadvantage in today’s Western multiethnic societies. This disadvantage is not based upon a particular ethnicity, but could rather be understood in terms of being defined as the Other – something that affects certain ethnicities more than others. Contemporary research argues that it is indeed relevant to talk about racialised others (de los Reyes and Mulinari, 2005; Burns et al., 2007).

Those belonging to an ethnic minority that is perceived as very different in relation to the autochthonous population, in terms of for example skin colour, accent, name or religion, are more likely to experience that their ethnicity is a disadvantage for their opportunities in society than those who are perceived as less different (Burns et al., 2007). Ethnicity, or the perception of “ethnicity” as a dividing line between people, is thus highly relevant as a mechanism of social stratification and inequality of opportunities.

In this book, we are primarily interested in ethnicity as a social category that affects individuals’ life chances and reproduces inequality in society – we are not considering the dimensions of ethnicity that refer to cultural identity or “other ways of life”. This does not mean that we render such dimensions insignificant, assuming that all immigrants and individuals that belong to an ethnic minority wish to participate in the majority society’s way of life, or that these groups’ right to express their particular identities is not important. On the contrary: in an ethnically stratified Western society, where the majority population’s culture and ethnicity has higher status, ethno-cultural particularities (such as wearing Muslim clothing, celebrating non-Christian holidays etcetera) might be expected to be
detrimental for the individual’s opportunities in the labour market and elsewhere. The main problem is from this perspective not, as strong multiculturalists would argue, a lacking recognition of difference, but a (negative) focus on difference in terms of ethnicity in situations where it is irrelevant.

Ethnicity might thus be understood as a status marker that differentiates between groups and individuals. As we have mentioned above, immigrants and ethnic minorities often belong to the most deprivileged socio-economic categories in the societies where they live. It might though be hard to tell how much of an immigrant’s disadvantage that springs from him or her being labelled as different in terms of ethnicity, and how much is related to his or her class position, a class position that often changes through migration as such: downward mobility from the position in the country of origin to the country of settlement is common (Portes and Zhou, 1993). When disadvantage in terms of lacking opportunities to upward mobility is reproduced in the second and even third generation, it is even more likely that discrimination is involved. In this way, “symbolic” distinctions between ethnicities come to have concrete socio-economic consequences for those who are shut out from good job opportunities because of factors such as their names or looks. Once again, the categories of class and ethnicity are often entwined.

From a perspective that identifies class and ethnicity as interrelated categories of stratification, one might assume that disadvantaged social classes and ethnic minorities would define similar interests in modifying current power structures. They often belong to similar socio-economic groups, and have similar experiences of exclusion. On the other hand, from a life-chance perspective, immigrants and natives from the lower social strata are most likely competitors over the same type of jobs. Consequently, groups defined as working class often tend to represent negative attitudes toward ethnic minorities and support emerging right-wing populism (Rydgren, 2007). Groups that at least potentially could have shared interests around economic issues are confronted with each other as they define difference by categories as race, colour, or ethnicity instead of in socio-economic terms. We are not claiming that ethnicity is only a social construction and not real, but share the view that a focus on such an understanding of “difference” might under certain circumstances become destructive, perpetuate inequality and increase confrontation between groups as they define each other in terms of ethnicity.
Social Class and Contemporary Social Theory

The Concept of Class

On a very general level – and following the seminal work of Marx and Weber – one can say that classes are positions in the order of production into which individuals are placed. This means that a class structure is a form of economic structure embedded in social relations and culture (Crompton and Scott, 2005: 186). For Marx, classes are the product of the capitalist mode of production in capitalist societies, and therefore primarily tied to property (cf. Scott, 1996). Moreover, the relationship between different classes is inherently antagonistic and exploitative. Central here is the labour theory of value, according to which the bourgeoisie exploits the proletariat by generating surplus value from the labour of the latter.

For Weber (1978; 2004), a person’s “class situation”, or her membership in a particular economic class, is determined by the life chances, which inhere from her position within a capitalist market. The latter consists of the markets for labour, commodities and credit. By being differently positioned in the class structure people have unequal access to property, skills and authority (Scott, 1996). In this way, classes need not necessarily be “communities”. Moreover, what Weber calls social classes are said to exist whenever there exists reproduction of economic classes over generations1. Also, and contra Marx, Weber talks about status, which is a form of stratification primarily based on prestige (the formation of prestige based groupings), lifestyles (practices related to consumption) and non-market based differences in life chances (e.g. citizenship) (Crompton, 1998). By distinguishing between class and status, Weber makes a distinction between two different sources of power and determinants of life chances: from market mechanisms on the one hand (class), and from group dynamics on the other (status)2.

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1 The process whereby economic classes, i.e. people sharing the same class situation, become social classes, Giddens calls class structuration. As he puts it, class structuration involves “the modes in which ‘economic relations’ become translated into ‘non-economic’ social structures” (Giddens, 1973: 105).

2 This also leads Weber to distinguish between what he calls the economic sphere composed of classes and the communal sphere composed of status groups (Weber, 1978; 2004).
In the last decades two approaches to class have been especially influential. The first is the neo-Weberian approach developed by John Goldthorpe, Robert Erikson, David Lockwood and others. This model uses employment positions for distinguishing different social classes. An influential incarnation is the EGP (Erikson, Goldthorpe and Portocarero) class scheme or Erikson–Goldthorpe schema (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992), where employment relations, with a distinction between the service relationship and the labour contract among employees, are used to derive social classes (Goldthorpe, 2000).3

The second approach is that developed by analytical Marxist Erik Olin Wright (1985; 1997; 2005). Here, class is a relational phenomenon involving the unequal access to the “rights and power over resources” inhering from the order of production (Wright, 2005). This means that class is about actors having control over economic resources, what he calls assets (property, organization, and skills). Wright’s approach has commonalities with Goldthorpe’s, but one difference is that for Wright, actors’ unequal access to assets is bound up with relations of exploitation. Here, he uses a game theoretical approach where the actors in an exploitative relationship are involved in a zero-sum game. Exploitation involves a situation where “the material welfare of the exploiters causally depends upon the material deprivations of the exploited” (Wright, 2005: 16). In this sense, exploitation is said to exist if (i) A has control over an asset, which B does not have access to, and (ii) B would be “better off” if A did not control this asset.

### The Existence of Social Classes

Needless to say, class analysis has been one of the central pillars in sociology. It has very much been a premise that modern Western societies are class societies. Yet in recent years, not least with the turn to culture in social theory, the centrality of class has been questioned and debated. Some scholars have even proclaimed the “death” of class (e.g. Bauman, 1992; Beck, 1992; Pakulski and Waters, 1996; Kingston, 2000). For Marxist class theory one core dilemma has been the overwhelming

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3 The Swedish Socio-economic Index (SEI) classification used in Gisselmann’s chapter in this volume is however, operationally, fairly similar to the EGP schema (Bihagen, 2000; Tåhlin, 2007). The SEI distinction is based on work task complexity, qualification requirements and employment status. It should be noted that social class sometimes is defined using occupational prestige scales (cf. Treiman, 1977).
critique formulated against the labour theory of value. As a response to this critique most leading Marxists and post-Marxists, such as Stuart Hall, Bob Jessop and Ernesto Laclau, have abandoned class relations as central to explain capitalism and focused on the capitalist order itself. While it may be argued that classes still exist, they are no longer seen as the central actors for explaining contemporary capitalist societies (Savage, 2000).

Moreover, while Wright tries to account for exploitation without anchoring it in the labour theory of value, critics have claimed that it is difficult to distinguish between assets, i.e. exploitative material resources in the form of organization, property and skill – and other resources (see the discussion in Savage et al., 2005). Second, it is far from clear that the access to assets actually entail exploitative relationships. One group may be excluded from getting access to a certain resource, but this may not mean that they are exploited, i.e. worse off than if they didn’t have access to this resource. In this sense, it could be argued that Wright’s approach follows more the Weberian tradition of researching social closure than the Marxist one. In sum, exploitative class relations cannot be said to have the kind of explanatory weight for understanding capitalist societies as originally conceived within the Marxist tradition4.

Weberian class analysis, not the least Goldthorpe’s class model, has fared better in this respect. Goldthorpe has been critiqued for having worked in a backward manner, that is, developing the class schema before the theory explaining it (Pahl, 1989; Scott, 1994). Thus, he has “put the cart before the horses” (Scott, 1994: 935). Another critique of class analysis, which has also affected Weberian conceptions, weakening the evidence for “class communities”, is class as existing as a form of collectivity (Grusky and Weeden, 2001; Savage et al., 2001; Bottero, 2004). Here the argument is that people today to a lower extent relate to one another explicitly in class terms, or construct their identities, self-worth, and status around class. Some have claimed that this is due to class structures breaking down as part of a process of individualization and increased reflexivity where diverse forms of individualized lifestyles replace collective class identities (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). For Beck class has become what he calls a “zombie category”, an outdated,

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4 For other attempts of conceptualising exploitation without anchoring it in the labour theory of value see Sørensen (2000) and Roemer (1982).
modernist concept that is inadequate for understanding contemporary conditions (Beck and Rutherford, 2002).  

The argument that classes no longer exist because laypeople do not consciously construct their identities around them can be criticized in two ways. Firstly, from a Weberian perspective one can claim that the argument is misplaced. By no means do processes of individualization and people’s “dis-identification” with class (cf. Skeggs, 1997) logically imply the death of class. As discussed above, Weber conceptualises class first and foremost as a source of power determined from market mechanisms and it is these structural processes that commonly are of interest for researchers within the area of social stratification. Thus, classes do not necessarily need to be “communities”. Using a Weberian concept of class, there is plenty of research that shows how the class situations within which individuals are placed continue to structure people’s life chances. Not least do the authors in this volume show this. Social class origin affects, among other things, educational choices and attainments (cf. Erikson and Jonsson, 1996; Breen and Jonsson, 2005) and one’s own social position (cf. Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992; Breen, 2004). Health and mortality are also affected by social class origin, but even more by one’s own position (cf. Lundberg, 1990; 1991; Erikson, 2006). In sum, there are clear and stable patterns in the way class structures life chances.  

Secondly, as Savage (2000) points out, Beck and Giddens draw a picture where traditional class communities of the modern, industrial age have been eroded by individualization processes. But it is questionable whether such collective class identities have ever been particularly prevalent. 

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5 It is important to note, however, that while critics of class analysis such as Beck (1992) claim that people increasingly form an individualized outlook to life, they also recognise that inequality still persists to a high degree. But these inequalities are not conceived of as being based on “class”.  
6 Children from a white-collar background proceed to higher education much more often than do children from blue-collar homes (Jonsson, 1988). This well established fact is referred to a) primary effects implying that children with white-collar backgrounds on average do better in school, whereas b) secondary effects capture that given the same grade, children from lower social classes make less “prestigious” educational choices (they choose theoretical subjects to a lower extent relative children from white-collar homes) (Jonsson, 1988). This can, in part, be connected to the educational attainment of their parents, but still there are pronounced social class differences (Ibid.). Other interpretations connect to Bourdieu’s (1984) notion of cultural capital, which to some extent overlaps with social class (Ibid.).
Evidence suggests that the working-class, which is a group with an allegedly strong class culture, have adopted instrumental outlooks for a long time (Goldthorpe et al., 1968-9; Marshall et al., 1988). In this way, Beck and Giddens can be criticized for having constructed a straw man argument (Savage, 2000).

Yet, it is clear that the “consciousness” model of social class no longer has much bearing among class scholars today, a fact that is also reflected in contemporary class theory. This is shown, firstly, in Goldthorpe’s (1996) recent “reorientation of class analysis”, where class is understood in a “minimal sense”, and in a way that downplays the role of cultural factors such as norms and values. Instead, he employs rational action theory (RAT), a weaker form of rational choice theory. The use this approach is shown in how he explains the persisting class differences in educational attainment: while cultural factors may be part in shaping the resources individuals have at hand (primary effects), the very choices of education (secondary effects) are determined through rational decision-making rather than norms and values. This means that class constrains enable the choices people make solely as a structural relation.\footnote{At the same time it can be noted that while cultural factors has come to play a less significant role in Goldthorpe’s conception of class, the turn to culture in social theory could also be said to be reflected in his recent interest in status and cultural consumption (see Chan and Goldthorpe, 2005; 2007a; 2007b; 2007c; 2007d).}

Another response to the critique of the consciousness model of class has been formulated by David Grusky and his colleagues (e.g. Grusky and Weeden, 2001; Grusky, 2005; Weeden and Grusky, 2005). The argument here is that classes conceived in terms of employment aggregates (as argued by, for instance, Goldthorpe and Wright) no longer exist as meaningful groupings where collective action, community, and solidarity take place. Rather, one must shift focus to what Grusky calls “small classes” constituted by occupational groups.

A third response has been in the form of a recent strand of mostly British researchers (e.g. Skeggs, 1997; 2004; Savage, 2000; Devine et al., 2005; Lawler, 2005) who work with a more “culturalist” notion of class, and for whom Pierre Bourdieu has been a common inspiration. Here it has been argued that processes of individualization are compatible with recognizing class as formative in identity construction and the cultural realm more generally. While class may rarely be a concept laypeople consciously
construct their identities around, it is bound up with their subjective meanings and practices, including their self-worth, status, beliefs, tastes and values. Drawing on Goffman (cf. 1951), Bourdieu (1984 [1979]; 1985; 1986) argues that class is tied to a person’s “sense of one’s place”, e.g. her largely intuitive understanding of where she belongs in a status hierarchy. Thus, for instance, a working-class person might express the view that going to an expensive restaurant is for “posh people” and not for “people like us”. In this sense, class informs people’s identities and subjective meanings by entailing them to draw distinctions and distance themselves from others (Savage, 2000; Bottero, 2004). This also means exploring the ways in which people value themselves and others, both morally and aesthetically, in classed ways (Bourdieu, 1984 [1979]; Lamont, 1992; 2000; Skeggs, 1997; 2004; Lawler, 2005). An informative example of the ways in which class works on the subjective level while simultaneously being dis-identified, is Beverly Skeggs’ (1997) ethnography of British working-class women in the Midlands. She depicts a view of working-class femininity as being highly stigmatised. This is shown by the fact that the women in her study actively denied or resisted being categorized as working-class, since it only signified bad taste and manners as well as social problems. To summarize, while the concept of class can still be recognized as being highly relevant in contemporary sociology, this has not come without a change in direction.

**Equality of Opportunity versus Equality of Conditions**

A distinction often made in social stratification research is between equality of opportunity, where life chances are dependent on ascribed categories of stratification (like gender, ethnicity or social class of origin)\(^8\) and equality of conditions (e.g. labour market rewards). It might be argued from an equality of opportunity strand that it is equality of opportunities (in e.g. the educational system) that is of importance in a society. Scholars having an equality of condition perspective may, on the other hand, claim that this is not enough since it is the equality of outcomes that are central. The latter would thus favour policy interventions to a higher extent.

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\(^8\) Research on equality of opportunities often deals with the connection between ascribed characteristics and educational attainment or achieved social position, whereas research on equality of conditions is more related to issues like the distribution of rewards in the labour market including also the welfare state (Breen and Jonsson, 2005).
It has also been argued that inequality in conditions between different groups in a society must be reduced before equality in opportunities can be achieved (Tawney, 1964). But the reverse is also often assumed, i.e. that high equality in opportunities justifies high inequality in conditions (in line with the meritocratic approach). Close to the question of equality in opportunities and equality in conditions lies the concept of justice, and how this is interpreted in different contexts. Whether, for instance, a meritocratic or an egalitarian interpretation of justice is dominant within a given society most certainly has consequences for how social inequality is viewed and dealt with in that society. Therefore, it is indeed interesting that the contributors in this volume represent Western societies where justice and equality is understood in different ways: Sweden, where the egalitarian tradition founded by social-democratic hegemony still remains strong in public discourse and policy, implying an extensive welfare system; the United States with dominant meritocratic ideals and priority to principles of freedom over principles of social equality leading to little state interference in the capitalistic market economy; and finally Britain, which somewhat represents a position in between with a social fluidity lower than in Sweden, but not being among the least fluid countries in Europe (Breen and Luijkx, 2004). It might be useful for the reader to keep these contextual differences in mind when reading the chapters.

Contributions

This volume is structured into three sections. Section I, *Justice, Equality and the Construction of Ethnicity*, is intended to lay the ground for further analysis of ethnic and class inequality in the subsequent chapters. It deals with on the one hand the concepts of justice and equality, on the other hand, the complexity of ethnic and pan-ethnic identity.

The former notions are explored within the context of an experimental designed study by Moa Bursell, where distributive justice attitudes among school children in Sweden are examined. Bursell analyses a possible impact of individual characteristics such as social class, gender and ethnicity as well as the dominant interpretations of ideologically important words on distributive justice attitudes by presenting a text with a justice dilemma to the children and letting them choose between six alternative ways of solving the problem. The options, in accordance with different theories of justice, were labelled: need, equality, original acquisition, merit, maximizing utility and social contract. It is concluded from the experiment that distributive justice attitudes to some degree vary...
depending on the children’s ethnic and socio-economic background and on whether the word “justice” is present or not.

The conceptions of ethic and pan-ethnic identity are examined through Van Tran’s multifaceted approach to the Latinos in the United States. The question on assimilation or racialisation of immigrants – in this chapter conceptualised as whether or not pan-ethnic identification tends to be more or less pronounced for Latino immigrants over time and across generations, is answered by Tran taking the national origin, arrival age, immigrant generation status and the heterogeneity among Latinos into account. Tran shows that first generation teen- and adult-arrival immigrants are more likely to use the Latino pan-ethnic identity compared to second generation immigrants, even when important social and background characteristics are adjusted for. However, these dissimilarities can be attributed to differences in the proficiency and use of the Spanish language as well as the use of Spanish media. Nonetheless, the identification as Latinos still varies across different Hispanic communities and for several reasons thus calling into question the often assumed homogeneity of Latinos in the United States.

Educational attainment is a central stratifying mechanism, allocating individuals to different positions in the social hierarchy, primarily through post-graduation labour market position. This is the focus of Section II, Ethnic Minorities and Education: Reproduction of Social Inequality.

This section starts with a chapter by Onoso Imoagene, using longitudinal data to compare the educational performance of second generation United States immigrant children relative to natives from kindergarten to fifth grade. Contrasting the racial and ethnicity groups of non-Hispanic white, black, Hispanic and Asian second generation immigrants to their native counterparts Imoagene finds, in line with previous research, that socio-economic status, parental school attainment expectations and teacher evaluations are important predictors of children’s school performance in math and reading. However, neither socio-economic status nor any other of the explanatory factors included in the analyses, could explain the sustained lower academic performance of Hispanic second generation immigrants to their native counterparts or the more favourable outcomes in math and reading scores of second generation black immigrants compared to native Blacks. It is argued that these students’ academic performances are affected by the interaction of class and ethnicity and their contexts of reception in the United States.
In the second chapter in this section, Sangna Kotecha sheds light on the under-representation of ethnic minority students in elite higher education institutions, by face-to-face interviews with students of foreign background in Britain. The author focuses on how educational choices are made among ethnic minority groups, reflecting a form of “self-discrimination” that restrains these students from applying to the most prestigious universities. The findings are presented in three main themes; *Elite higher education institutions’ locations are not “desirable”*, *Elite higher education institutions require too much a “change of direction”* and *Low perceived probability of success at elite higher education institutions*. The results suggest strong parent and peer group influence as well as a fear of not fitting in and being unable to meet the perceived requirements.

This section’s third paper by Anna Zimdars draws further attention to the fact that there are differences between ethnic minorities and Whites in the quality of higher education in Britain, even though ethnic minorities in general are well represented. In this multimethods case study of Oxford University, one of the leading universities in Britain, it is shown that the application rate of ethnic minorities resembles the shares of high achievers within these groups, but the acceptance rates are much lower compared to high achieving Whites. This result holds true for South Asia ethnic minorities with adjustment for relevant factors such as grades, test scores, subject of study, and social class. The findings stress lower cultural capital as well as attitudes to higher education to be part of the explanation, but it can not wholly explain the disadvantages of these ethnic minorities. To gain further understanding Zimdars conducted qualitative interviews with selectors for admission to Oxford. It is concluded that the interview selection processes for admission to Oxford University opens the possibility for the predominantly white selectors to higher education to advantage white applicants and is problematic in an equal opportunity perspective.

In the final paper of this section, Laurence Lessard-Phillips argues that immigrant status as well as ethnic belonging plays a significant role in attainment of higher education in Britain. Drawing on theories on immigrant adaptation and educational attainment Lessard-Phillips shows that, in general, second generation immigrants have higher chances of holding university degrees relative to natives. This holds true also when adjusting for parents’ educational level. The heterogeneity in educational attainment among diverse ethnic groups is however revealed once
ethnicity is included in the analyses. Asian Indian men do significantly better relative to Whites, whereas Black Caribbean men and women clearly have disadvantages in higher educational attainment compared to those belonging to the white ethnic category. It is though emphasized that this could be due to differences in socio-economic position, which, due to limitations of the data, could not be taken into consideration. Contradictory to what was expected, having one native and one immigrant parent does not provide any advantages in higher educational attainment compared to those second generation immigrants with two immigrant parents.

In the third and final section, *The Importance of Social Class and Ethnicity for Understanding Inequality*, we move beyond the educational system to illustrate how socio-economic status and ethnicity are key factors in understanding the processes of social stratification and inequality in society in general. It is here exemplified by the difficulties ethnic minorities face in finding a job which points in the direction of labour market discrimination as well as differences in health to the disadvantage of those with lower socio-economic status, implying class-related health inequalities.

Working life is doubtlessly one of the most important contexts for the reproduction of inequality. Some of the labour market differences can be attributed to discrimination, related to factors such as gender, ethnicity, sexuality and disability. In chapter one in this section, Neli Demireva approaches the issue of labour market inequality by focusing on the different job search methods that ethnic minorities use compared to natives in Britain. In addition to job search method differentials, the impact of the employed method on holding a professional position relative to an intermediate or low/unskilled position is examined. It is shown, among other things that the Chinese respondents use social ties to a higher extent compared to the other groups, while these are less frequently employed by Black Africans and Caribbean. These latter groups instead tend to rely on state employment agencies. Indians make more use of private employment agencies compared to the other minority categories. The results are discussed in terms of strategies ethnic minorities employ to improve their labour market chances and avoid discrimination. This approach is important not the least as it contrasts the perception of disadvantaged groups as passive victims of discriminatory structures, by showing that they are also actors.
In the second chapter of this section, Marit Gisselmann analyses the influence of social class and working conditions on infant mortality. Inequality in birth outcome in itself questions assumptions about equal opportunities, since influence of social class begins before birth. Gisselmann argues that social inequality in infant mortality can definitely be considered as unjust, as infants obviously have no ability to influence what social conditions they are born into. The results show that a substantial part of social class inequalities in infant mortality in Sweden can be attributed to the physical and psychosocial dimensions of the mothers' working conditions. Low job control was the single most important factor explaining 45-58 per cent of the increased risk of infant mortality for a majority of all manual workers and self-employed compared to higher non-manual workers. Physical demands and job hazards also had significant connection to infant mortality for these occupational groups, while this was not the case for social support at work and psychological demands of the job. Thus, this chapter indicates that a substantial part of inequalities in infant mortality is tied to the social structure through working conditions, and thereby possible to decrease through the implement of policy directed at working conditions.

References


Chapter One


