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The material and the symbolic in theorizing social stratification: issues of gender, ethnicity and class

ABSTRACT

Within most approaches to stratification gender and ethnicity are seen to pertain primarily to the symbolic or cultural realms, whilst class is regarded as pertaining to material inequality. This constructs gender and ethnic positioning as entailing honour, deference, worth, value and differential treatment (sometimes expressed through the notion of 'status'), but the social relations around these are themselves not seen as constitutive of social stratification. In this paper I will rethink social stratification away from the polarity between the material and the symbolic, and argue that material inequality, as a set of outcomes relating to life conditions, life chances and solidary processes, is informed by claims and struggles over resources of different types, undertaken in terms of gender, ethnicity/race and class. This formulation allows us to include these categorial formations, alongside class, as important elements of social stratification i.e. as determining the allocation of socially valued resources and social places/locations.

KEYWORDS: Stratification; gender; class; ethnicity; material; symbolic

INTRODUCTION

Despite the plurality of approaches to social stratification, ranging from the idea that it covers all forms of material inequality (Crompton 1998), to the view that it is concerned with class inequalities (Scott 2000), most approaches contain an assumption that gender and ethnicity relate to parameters of identity and difference which may, or may not, influence an individual's material position, but that this influence feeds into a process of stratification determined elsewhere. Moreover, gender and ethnicity, as social constructions, are seen to pertain primarily to the symbolic or cultural realms, whilst class is regarded as pertaining to material inequality. This constructs gender and ethnic positioning as implicating honour,

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deference, worth, value and differential treatment (sometimes expressed through the notion of 'status'), but the social relations around these are themselves not seen as constitutive of social stratification.

In this paper I will rethink social stratification away from the polarity between the material and the symbolic, and argue that material inequality, as a set of outcomes relating to life conditions, life chances and solidary processes, is informed by claims and struggles over resources of different types, undertaken in terms of gender, ethnicity/race and class. This formulation allows us to include these categorial formations, alongside class, as important elements of social stratification i.e. as determining the allocation of socially valued resources and social places/locations. Whilst other divisions are also important elements in social relations (such as age, health, disability, religion and so on), the divisions of gender and ethnicity are treated here as lying at the heart of the social (Anthias 1998a) because they constitute particularly salient constructions of difference and identity on the one hand, and hierarchization and unequal resource allocation modes on the other. This view will be developed later in this paper. A conception of social stratification will be presented which acknowledges the existence of the material and the symbolic within all the major social divisions, and argues that they all constitute aspects of social stratification.

However, such a conception is developed as a corrective to existing arguments and in order to push the debate forward and not as an alternative totalizing theoretical schema. As Therborn (2000) has persuasively argued, it is vital to reframe the central concepts we use in the light of current developments. These include the growth of non-class forms of collective struggle (hailed by the new social movements) and a growth in interest and debate on gender and ethnic divisions and identities (Anthias and Yuval Davis 1992; Rattansi and Westwood 1994; Bradley 1996; Anthias 1996, 1998a; Payne 2000) . This has gone hand in hand with what some might see as the colonization of 'the social' by the cultural (the growth of a cultural studies focus) and the sweeping away of the grand schemas of sociology by the steady and seductive hand of the postmodern turn in sociology. Add to this the grand sweep of globalization theory which sees the growth of global economic, social and cultural forms acting to displace the understanding of identities, states, classes and communication modes as sociologists have tended to treat them (i.e. in terms of singular social systems usually defined vis à vis the boundaries of the nation-state). Moreover, the growing importance of cultural products as well as identity formations is indicated by a range of sociological work (e.g. Crook et al. 1992; Lash and Urry 1994; Castells 1996, 1997). All these developments turn our attention to interrogating the heuristic value of some of our most cherished concepts in sociology; one of the most central is that of social stratification.

What is also raised in this discussion is the slipperiness of the concept of class that is seen by stratification theorists to be identical with material inequality. It is worth rehearsing some of the difficulties with this concept. In everyday language, class is a multilayered and diverse signifier of social

rank. The kind of criteria used for ranking vary from visible marks inscribed in the body around accent, weight, 'style' or manners, to ideas about 'breeding' or inheritance and finally to notions of income, wealth and access to economic resources (a good example of this was a recent Kilroy programme on BBC1, 1st June, 2000). In the academic arena, there are similarly plural approaches (as Crompton 1998 so clearly shows), between Marxist and Weberian approaches and the developments of these on the one hand, to approaches that stress the culture of class or status indicators. At the same time there is a shifting of ground or a 'fuzziness' of the class concept: on the one hand it constitutes a particular way of explaining or understanding economic inequalities and on the other hand it actually stands as a shorthand for those economic inequalities. Also there is a sliding of focus from what one might think of as economic outcomes to economic processes and from class outcomes to class processes. If class is to be more than an auditing tool which tells us who is where in the occupational ladder, and who owns what or works where (all important questions in their own right), it must have a heuristic potential in understanding social relations. This paper attempts to indicate some of the problems involved and begins to reconceptualize the frame of reference for addressing these rather than claiming to provide the answers.

THE HEGEMONY OF 'CLASS'

The beginning of Celia Heller's book on *Structured Social Inequality* begins thus

> The study of social stratification is one of the most flourishing areas of American sociology today . . . The systematic study of social stratification is a phenomenon of only the last three decades' (1969: 1).

This was not true of European sociology, where class was central in the development of sociology (Nisbett 1967), and not only traceable to the influence of Marxist thought. The classical tradition in sociology, for example in the work of Comte and Spencer amongst others, was concerned with the development of industrial society. Comte was interested in the division of labour and the relationship to solidary social bonds. Durkheim was greatly influenced by Saint Simon's preoccupations with the moral dimensions of social organization. He particularly focused on the importance of the division of labour as the gel which forged particular types of social bonds whilst destroying others, expressed in the notions of organic and mechanical solidarity and the collective conscience (Durkheim 1964).

Social stratification is not only a particular form of social differentiation, but attaches value and meaning to social differentiation, producing hierarchization, differential resource allocation and unequal social and political positioning (Anthias 1998a). Some writers, particularly those

influenced by a Marxist approach to stratification, will emphasize the exploitation that takes place in the sphere of the production and reproduction of economic resources, i.e. within the mode of production. Here, social stratification becomes coterminous with economic class. Social classes are perceived as mutually dependent within the productive system, establishing simultaneously bonds of co-dependency and a striking and unassailable antagonism at the very heart of the social order. They are seen as forms of collective social organization, in a condition of relational conflict, underpinned by the relations found within the economic structure. Class conflicts generated by class processes are seen as the motor of history, and generate the movement from one stage of human and social development to the other, within the Marxist paradigm (Giddens 1971). They are an ubiquitous force that structures our very existence in the world, and the meaning we find and give to it. Within this schema, there emerges as a phantom, a potentially classless society, built out of the sum of the contradictions that lie at the heart of capitalist society. Such an approach has, in the final analysis, little space to give to the dimensions of stratification that sociologists recognize now as relating to gender and ethnicity, as significant social forces in their own right. These become merely the *natural conditions* (as in Engels (1968) idea of the natural division of labour) for human life, upon which class is built. They are then constructed as lying outside the parameters of 'the social' and not subject themselves to sociological explanation. Their embodied and constructed forms are explicable by the processes found in the production and reproduction of economic resources.

Social stratification has also been identified with forms of sociality and economic inequality, relating to the sphere of the distribution, allocation and exchange of skills and resources in the market place, within the Weberian framework (Weber 1964). Such a framework, drawing similar conclusions to Marxism about the centrality of the economic in the domain of the social, none the less treats class inequality as a product of the free exchange of skills and resources, rather than as a precondition of the form that exchange takes. In other words, whilst endowing class with an equal ontological significance (in terms of the centrality of the distributive mechanisms of the market for social relations), it does not give it the epistemological primacy found within Marxist accounts (since for Weber class conflict was not an essential but rather a possible constituent of class relations). Nor was class placed as a central organizing principle for the explication of social change. Social stratification, in this approach, involves the construction of unequal life chances or life conditions. Here, a distinction between class and status is made which places the categorial formations of ethnicity and gender in the latter category; for Weber status groups (particularly in terms of usurpation) could affect markets and therefore affect the operation of class relations.

The view of social stratification as a reflection of the natural distribution of talents and motivations, found in the work of Parsonsian style social theorists (Parsons 1951, Davis and Moore 1945), mainly from America, no

longer occupies a significant part of the cartography of class discourse within academia, although significantly it is still a central element of neo-conservative thought and policy. Stanislaw Ossowski's (1963) distinction between perspectives that approved or questioned the social order, seems singularly dichotomous, as well as outdated. For example, the depiction of a functionalist perspective, so quoted in 'A' level sociology text books, an irritant to their first year university tutors, has very little purchase in contemporary debates (for an exception see Saunders 1990). This is not only because of the decline of academic debate around Parsons work (Parsons 1951), but because the sweeping depiction of a functionalist neo-conservative perspective, and its location within the Parsonsian framework, as it derived from Durkheim, now appears singularly misleading.

Whilst the Marxist and Weberian paradigms still occupy a central place in theorizing class relations, it is no longer true that they encapsulate the distinction, if it were ever true, between those who oppose existing inequalities and are concerned with transforming society radically, and those who are its apologists, or would like to see more piecemeal changes. The Marxist camp is not so clearly full of revolutionaries, nor the Weberian camp of social liberals. This is in keeping not only with the diversification within the two camps, but also with the developments in neo-Marxism and neo-Weberianism, that led Frank Parkin (1979), a Weberian, to denounce Nikos Poulantzas (1973), a well-known structuralist Marxist, as a closet Weberian!

Much of the impetus for engaging with the issue of collective struggles and divisions around class has also disappeared. There has occurred a growth in more consensual forms of class politics in the West, and the end of 'the working class' in modern academic debates as well as in political arguments. Modern debates on class have focused on fragmentation and the growth of flexible and differentiated labour markets, thus echoing some of the concerns of postmodern theory without taking on board the theoretical principles underlying it. Another strand of debate has resurrected the idea of the underclass; a notion that fits uneasily into traditional sociological approaches to class, and most closely resembles the idea of 'the dangerous classes' (re Murray 1990). Traditional stratification theory continues debating the issue of 'class places' versus 'class subjects' (e.g. see Scott 1994), a debate originating in the 1970s within Althusserian approaches and fuelled particularly by the work of Nikos Poulantzas (1973).

Developments in class theory have included, amongst other concerns, a focus on the boundary issue, i.e. how to delineate the boundaries between the various classes, the location of supervisory grades and of the managerial strata, as well as the petit bourgeoisie. A particular debate in Britain has been on employment relations and the fragmentation of occupational categories, particularly through the work of John Goldthorpe and his colleagues (Goldthorpe 1987[1980]; Goldthorpe and Heath 1992), and it has been argued that class relations are strictly those related to the relations of

employment. The labour process (e.g. Braverman 1974 and the debates around his work) has been subject to analysis, and the growth of flexible labour markets, as well as segmented labour markets, has been extensively researched (Dex 1987; Doeringer and Piore 1971; Crompton and Sanderson 1990). Despite acknowledging that gender and ethnic/race processes are relevant in determining social positioning, many of these approaches have been largely unable to really think through the implications of this for their traditional foci (Crompton 1998[1993]).

EXPLAINING GENDER AND CLASS AND ETHNICITY AND CLASS

Although important substantive analysis has taken place, little of this work has been able to treat women or ethnic difference, other than in terms of gendered or ethnic labour power. The issue of gender has been understood, for example, within segmented labour market theory, as relating to the concrete evidence that women are primarily placed within particular sectors of the labour market, which disadvantage and ghettoise them (Doeringer and Piore 1971; Dex 1987). Alternatively, the position of women in sexist social relations, and in their familial role, as mothers and wives, has been used to explain their material positionality within employment relations (Beechey 1986). Although this work has drawn attention to the intricacies of determination of female employment, it has not considered how gender, as a set of social relations, is actually constitutive of a broader system of social inequality. Or to put it another way, the problematic of labour market analysis has been retained, whilst adding to it a contextual basis, through investigating the role of the family. The exploration of the relationship between the family and work has yielded some important insights. However, the assumption is that sources of *material* inequality emanate essentially from work or class relations.

The proliferation of writing on what might be called gender and ethnic studies, or women's studies and race, reflects a departure from the mainstream tradition. Class approaches have underpinned, however, some of the most influential contributions to the fields of gender and ethnicity/race. For example, gender and ethnicity have been seen as reducible to, and therefore emanating from, class relations; as false impersonations of class. The work of Marxist feminists, for example, sought to provide a Marxist informed analysis of gendered subordination, often applying Marxist economic categories to what later was acknowledged to be an inappropriate object, women (Beechey 1986; Barrett 1980; Anthias 1980). Some of these approaches sought to see gender as primarily a class relation, or as serving the needs of capitalism. Gender was seen in terms of the role that women played (in the capitalist system) as a reserve army of labour (Beechey 1977) or as domestic unpaid labourers (Gardiner 1975; Molyneux 1979).

This tradition has sat alongside one that singled out men and male

interests as the primary cause of women's subordination, erecting an unbridgeable gulf between male and female interests and needs. Within some versions of feminist theory, for example, patriarchy may be seen to form a separate system of social relations which relates to gender inequalities. The notion of patriarchy was often required to do the *theoretical* work for such a view, often married to the idea of a male capitalism (Eisenstein 1979). Patriarchal social relations have been treated as emanating from, or as constitutive of, the power that men have over women (e.g. Walby 1990 has a particularly sophisticated model, as has Fiona Williams 1989). In the case of some versions of radical feminism, such as materialist feminism (e.g. Christine Delphy 1977), the relation between a man and his wife has been regarded as equivalent to that between the capitalist and worker, reproducing in the domestic sphere the classical relations of capitalism. The view of an autonomous realm of patriarchal social relations has been heavily criticized (Anthias 1991, Anthias and Yuval Davis 1992; Pollert 1996), as has the class reductionist approach to gender (e.g. Anthias and Yuval Davis 1983, 1992; Walby 1990).

Some of this work, as already mentioned, sought to define men and women as two separate classes. In the important debate on gender and stratification (Crompton and Mann 1986), there is an attempt, within a more traditional stratification approach, to look at the position of women in class terms, allocating women a class position. For example, one area of debate, fuelled by Goldthorpe's claim that gender was irrelevant to social stratification (1983), sought to determine whether women should be treated as belonging to the same social class as their husbands, or whether they should be classified separately, in terms of their own occupation. Moreover, there was some discussion about whether class should be attributed to the family unit, rather than the individuals within it. Such a debate assumed class to be a descriptor of life conditions and life chances, defined it in terms of employment or role within employment relations (a position further developed by Goldthorpe 1987) and then sought to categorize women within this framework, either as workers in their own right, or through the work of their husbands. In actual fact, this venture had very little to do with thinking through the role of gendered social relations, in the production of unequal social outcomes, for individuals and groups. More promising is recent work in the area such as that by Crompton and Harris (1997), and Crompton (1998) which provides a much more nuanced approach to the intersections in people's lives between gender and class.

Therefore, class approaches have underpinned some of the most influential contributions to the field, and without doubt served to fuel most of the important debates in the last three decades on issues of gender and class as well as ethnicity/race and class (Anthias 1990). A backlash to this is found in varieties of feminism that distance themselves from a class analysis. This is partly related to the demise of Marxism both in the academy and as a political ideology, but also to the growth of the claim that gendered

identities are not products of class, nor can they be reduced to the workings of capital. This has been characterized by the growth of psychoanalytic and post-structuralist approaches which rely on the work of Lacan (1977) and Derrida (1981), emphasizing difference. More recent debates have focused around the gendered body and sex difference as a social construct which cannot be distinguished, in the way that Ann Oakley (1974, 1981) maintained, from gender. Both sex and gender are seen as discursive social constructions and, in the case of Butler, as accomplished through performativity (see Butler 1993; Hood Williams and Cealey Harrison 1998).

Ethnicity and class, when twinned together, have led to problems of reductionism, where ethnicity becomes a disguise for class or its symbolic manifestation. Marxist approaches may treat it as false consciousness, where the real divisions of class take on symbolic forms. Ethnicity may also be seen as being a way that classes organize (not as a disguise but as a vehicle), in order to struggle over economic resources, as in the work of writers such as Hechter (1987). This is less reductionist, but again ethnicity is treated as a dependent phenomenon, whereas class is treated as about 'real' resource claims.

Alternatively, twinning ethnicity and class may focus on the correlations between the actors who occupy particular ethnic positions, and those in particular class positions. This is to focus on how actors within each coincide on scales relating to social position. As an example, black groups who suffer racial disadvantage are then seen to occupy a particular class position, or class fraction (Phizacklea and Miles 1980), in the Marxist variant of this approach, or are a sub-proletariat within the Weberian approach (Rex 1981). Another facet of this is to treat one as an *effect* of the other, in terms of the influence of the valuation (and prejudice/racism/discrimination) that accrues to particular ethnic positions, and how this is manifested in terms of class effects or outcomes. Or it can be done in terms of the mutually reinforcing disadvantages of ethnicity and class (Myrdal 1969). Much of the debate on 'race' and class (Anthias 1990), takes as a starting point the economic position of Black people (Castles and Kosack 1973; Castells 1975), links 'race' and economic processes and argues that racism, as an ideology, is the causal factor in this relation (e.g. Rex and Tomlinson 1979). However, as Miles (1989) points out, there are a range of exclusionary practices in society that are not merely coterminous with racism but are a component part of a wider structure of class disadvantage.

These positions are problematic (Solomos 1986, Anthias 1990). One underlying difficulty is that whilst the delineation of connections, correlations and so on between ethnicity and class are useful, as long as there is a clear operationalization of the terms in substantive analyses, it is much more difficult to specify the mechanisms at work. Moreover, the attempts to find correlations assumes each one is homogeneously constituted, has a unitary role and is mutually exclusive e.g. that all class members belong to a particular ethnic group. The depiction of Black people as an underclass (Castles and Kosack 1973) or as a class fraction (Phizacklea and Miles

1980), for example, underemphasizes the heterogeneity given by the distinct employment characteristics of different 'racialized' groups (e.g. Asians, Afro-Caribbeans and other colonial migrants in Britain). It also takes no account of gender differentiation. The concern to show the class bases of 'race' allows divisions within the category to be glossed over.

Many of the difficulties of these forms of analysis relate to the ways in which class is seen to be a division marked by material difference, and inequality of positioning around material resources, whether conceived in the area of production or distribution, determined by relations of exploitation or by relations of the market. Ethnicity, on the other hand, is treated as relating to being positioned in terms of culture, or in the symbolic and identificational realm, with particular behavioural or action elements flowing from this. This position coexists with one that is interested in the ways in which ethnicity cross-cuts class (for example in terms of the health or employment characteristics of minority ethnic groups). However, where the latter is concerned the tendency is to provide empirical data showing a correlation between ethnic and class position, rather than exploring the ways in which ethnicity is implicated in the social relations that produce inequalities (e.g. Payne and Payne 2000). The lasting effect of these traditions of exploring social inequality, through the primacy of the economic realm, heralded by the Marxist framework and revised within the Weberian tradition and the aftermath, have seriously skewered academic conceptions of inequalities and social stratification. They have been impediments to thinking about inequalities in a more holistic and multidimensional way, and are premised on the ontological and epistemological primacy of economic/ material needs and their social organization in human life.

THE PROBLEM OF BOUNDARIES: UNITIES AND DIVISIONS

However, it is not enough merely to recognize the intersections in the lived relations of class, gender and ethnicity and to produce a pluralist model of the stratification system. If the notion of 'social division' is to become a heuristic tool and the pillar of a stratification approach, it is necessary to show the centrality of the boundaries of the categories for the social relations of stratification. In other words, the issue of social categories of difference and identity raises the problem of the unities and divisions of class, gender and ethnicity/race. This hails a number of different elements at different levels of abstraction. On the one hand, unity may be produced out of a classificatory process where similarities are denoted and grouped together, thereby constructing taxonomies. This raises the question of how that similarity is established: across what central parameters or *boundaries*. Often there is a concern with finding an original and necessary point for placing boundaries. General social theories, say around capitalism, around industrialization or indeed around primordialism, may be used for seeing a boundary as absolute, or explicable in terms of a priori assumptions

about the nature of the human, or the nature of human social organization (found for example in primordialist views of ethnic organization). This issue is both philosophically and sociologically interesting but irresolvable. More pertinent is to ask questions of historical determination, however fraught with problems of evidence and interpretation. Such an exercise cannot yield totalizing and general theories but may help to delineate patterns and regularities, what Durkheim thought of as social facts.

The issue of boundaries relates not only to the difference in the boundary between class, gender and ethnic groups, but to the boundary between one social class and another, as well as one ethnic group and another. The issue of the boundaries for defining particular class groupings has been a long standing concern in class theory, with its problematic of homogeneity of positioning within class groupings. On what dimensions do people have to share (or have similar) functions, conditions, life chances or solidarities to be placed in one social class rather than another? A concern in contemporary class theory has been particularly with defining the boundary between the petit bourgeoisie and the working class, as well as bourgeoisie (e.g. see Poulantzas 1973; Carchedi 1977; Wright 1985; Scase 1992).

The issue of boundaries for defining ethnicity exists at two levels: in terms of the ethnic as a boundary (Barth 1969; Wallman 1979; Anthias 1992b) rather than a set of cultural diakritika, and the problem of who can be classified as belonging within the boundary, i.e. the criteria by which entry and closure take place. Issues are raised about *who* does the classifying, *what uses* this is put to, and what are its *effects*. Within any particular population there are boundaries around both one set of diakritika, and around others. For example, the diakritika used for placing individuals into gender groups are different to those used to place them into ethnic and class groups. Individuals, therefore, will not always be placed together using different diakritika.

Putting the two terms of unities and divisions together helps us to see that within any unity there are also divisions, and within any divisions or boundary points, there are unities. The constructed, rather than essential or fixed nature of the boundaries, becomes clear. Different markers may be used to define the boundaries. This is raised, for example, by the debate on the category Black, and the shift from seeing it as incorporating both Asians and Afro-Caribbeans, to seeing it as describing only Afro-Caribbeans (e.g. Modood 1988; Anthias and Yuval Davis 1992; Anthias 1994; Brah 1991). Alternatively, it may be used as a form of self identification, and not dependent necessarily on ascriptive criteria, or may be used as a political identity. A group may be defined, at different times, in terms of culture, place of origin or religion e.g. Jews may be seen as a cultural group, as a diaspora with a reclaimed homeland (Israel), or as a religious community. Greek Cypriots may be seen as either Cypriot or Greek. These are labels, as well as claims, that are produced socially and enter into the realm of assertion, contestation and negotiation over resource allocation, social positioning and political identity.

If gender, race/ethnicity and class are central elements structuring resource allocation, it is necessary to explore their ontological status. Gender, ethnic and class categories are ways by which categories of the population are produced and organized. In other words they are modes for classifying populations, and therefore do not denote either necessary or absolute ontological realms. They constitute different social ontologies around different parameters of location, within analytically separate spheres or realms of being (Anthias 1991; Anthias 1992a; Anthias and Yuval Davis 1992; Anthias 1996; Anthias 1998a). This does not construct them as separate sets of social relations or systems of domination as Walby (1990) suggests, however. Although it is true that they each specify a particular object of reference for making the category: this does not imply any essential ontological inevitability around any of the categories. None the less they are all linked to sociality: *Class*: in terms of the production and reproduction of economic life; *gender*: the production and reproduction of sexual difference and reproduction; and *ethnicity*: the production and reproduction of collective and solidary bonds relating to origin or cultural difference. Whilst not constituting them as autonomous systems this denotes a specificity to the forms of subordination that characterize them (Anthias 1996, 1998a). They are historically produced and therefore variable and contingent. They may or may not be prerequisites of sociality but they are certainly forms that sociality historically takes.

A *relational ontological* space or social domain constitutes the framework for investigating the social relations of difference and inequality. The ontological spaces are not essentialist but themselves social. Positing the existence of ontological spaces, moreover, can be seen as an *heuristic device* which by signposting the ontological territory of a set of social relations, is able to consider their manifestation in local and specific contexts: it recognizes variability. This approach implies that it is futile to seek for the origins of differentiated and stratified social outcomes with reference to a single causal principle. These may relate to the overall societal importance of resource production and allocation. The materialism of this position, however, treats resource allocation in a much broader way than that found in the notion of 'the economic'; it suggests an interplay between symbolic and material value and the spilling over of one onto the other without necessarily *always* giving primacy to one over the other.

Ethnicity, gender and class are therefore grids for conceptualizing unity, difference and division, and involve social and political representations (rather than constituting concrete or permanent groups). Class classification starts off from the allocation of individuals, sorting their competencies on the basis of criteria of marketability of skills, economic function, property and knowledges. Membership of individuals in ethnic and race groups is also determined by the possession of criteria of entry, but using other markers, such as colour of skin, cultural origin, language and so on. Individuals are attributed levels and types of competencies on that basis, maybe extrapolating from certain tendencies of the group and seeing

these as inevitable, rather than as a product of social relations. In other words, competencies are endowed a posteriori on the basis of already meeting other criteria of entry. In real labour markets the two systems are intertwined: for example, *what* is regarded as a marketable skill may be dependent on *who* possesses the skill (e.g. the market value of medical degrees may go down if the people who have them are endowed with intrinsically lower social worth, or are regarded as not so deserving: the feminization and ethnicization of occupations may lead to this syndrome).

A significant difference between class and the other categories, is that in the case of class, there is no natural reproduction posited, although individuals may be seen to inherit characteristics from their parents, which means that they may be regarded as fated to be members of a particular class. But movement in or out is seen as a product of individual capacities. In the case of race/ethnicity and gender, there can be no movement in and out in terms of capacity. The capacity is written into the very classification. However, we should note that Cohen (1988) has argued for the racialization of class, as has Miles (1993).

There are three related aspects, therefore, raised by this discussion of unities and boundaries: the shifting and contextual nature of the boundaries that fix the unities; the processes which give rise to particular symbolic and material manifestations of the social categories; and the ways in which the social categories intersect in producing social outcomes for individuals and for social structures. Therefore, class, gender and ethnicity/race cannot be seen as constructing *permanent fixed groups* but involve shifting constellations of social actors, depending on the ways the boundaries of a denoted category are constructed.

THE MATERIAL AND THE SYMBOLIC

My approach attempts to avoid both the view of groups as permanent constructions of fixed difference (found in the idea of an autonomous realm of gender difference within versions of patriarchy), and the idea of the analytical distinctions between social divisions being constituted via a difference between material reality, on the one hand, and the cultural and symbolic realm on the other. This position is found in both class reductionist approaches and traditional stratification approaches. My approach also avoids the 3 systems approach favoured by Silvia Walby (1990) and by Fiona Williams (1989).

As I indicated earlier, both material and symbolic elements are to be found across all the social categories. Categories therefore may be distinguished not through the polarity of the material and the symbolic realms, but rather in terms of the specific *forms* these take. Materiality is here defined in terms of the production and allocation of socially valued resources of different types.

These constitute elements which are definitive of social positioning

within a range of social practices. The notion of materiality is therefore not restricted to the economic. Once 'the material' is formulated around the idea of resource allocation and hierarchical placement, with regard to different types of socially valued resources (which can be cultural as well as strictly economic: although economic resources may possess cultural value and cultural resources may possess economic value), this allows ethnicity and gender a definitive role in a theory of social stratification.

The significance of the economic lies in the production of value at the level of reproduction of human life and as a central form of exchange, and functions particularly as a primary context for all other value i.e. as their necessary condition of existence. Where Marx made that sphere the determining one, it is also possible to see it as an a priori condition of existence for all the others, in terms of allowing for the satisfaction of culturally determined survival and reproduction needs. However, the same could be said of sex difference with regard to biological reproduction as a prerequisite for human life, and the existence of solidary bonds as pre-requisites of social and human life.

Moreover, although it appears incontrovertible that human beings need to produce in order to survive, the economic is but one, albeit a central and necessary resource, *up to a certain level* constituting a condition of existence for the other resources. After this level, economic value assumes a symbolic value. Marx himself was very clear on this, and raised the issue of the symbolic (and indeed the psychic), from the point of view of the fetishism of commodities. This insight, however, was used to reinforce the argument of historical materialism. However, it could be used to subvert it. For once commodities become fetishized they no longer function as mere material or economic value, but assume a cultural and symbolic value. If this is the case, Marx is acknowledging the important role of the symbolic and the cultural within social stratification. The fetishism of commodities no longer gives commodities mere economic value, either as use value or exchange value, but endows them with human value and social worth.

Developing this insight can take us in the direction of recognizing the importance, within stratification, of the role played by social value, defined as symbolic, cultural and political in terms of providing access to socially valued resources and positionings. These are not impersonations of the material, nor do they provide its conditions of existence alone, but are embodiments of material positionality in their own right. They construct places and positions in terms of the allocation of human value, economic resources and a range of other resources. Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital (1990) goes some way in acknowledging the role of cultural resources as a form of capital. However, the analogy with capital is too focused around how they might enter into providing access, in the final analysis, to economic resources. But economic resources are not the most valuable resource from the point of view of social positioning, at least not in any essentialist way. Economic resources have to be endowed with a symbolic or cultural value for them to be seen as socially meaningful, in

producing social hierarchies relating to life conditions and life chances. Imagine a situation where money can buy a big house, but cannot buy entry into a sports club or the formal rights of citizenship. Or imagine where money or capital can buy workers, and can thereby, through relations of exploitation, produce more capital, but cannot buy social respect or membership of a community. National lottery winners have access to economic value, but may not be empowered politically, socially or culturally by this despite the power they may acquire as consumers, or the freedom to live a life of leisure. In addition, cultural ideas about consumption values mediate the mere notion of economic value. The value of a particular trainer or eye shades is not solely dependent on the economic value they possess. Advertising and marketing constructs the value of commodities; they do not have value in and of themselves.

From the point of view of capitalism *as a social system and as a system of production*, the focus on the economic and its effects is vital, but this focus need not be retained in the analysis of systems for the social allocation of resources and in terms of social relations of hierarchization and inferiorization, important elements of social division and stratification in modern society. Even acknowledging the epistemological primacy of 'the economic', in the final analysis, as Althusserian revisions of Marx have done (Althusser 1969, 1971), does not require us to maintain this primacy in terms of explaining the social allocation of resources to *concrete* individuals and groups. This discussion might indicate that Marx's historical materialism is embedded in a framework that essentializes economic value, rather than seeing it as socially contingent.

If this is the case, then material value is not only produced within the sphere of production, the labour market and the economy, but is generated in relation to symbolic and cultural processes. Moreover, gender and ethnicity involve the allocation of hierarchies of value, inferiorization as well as unequal resource allocation (on their basis and not through the intermediate relation of production relations). For example, women may be paid less for the same job as men, or jobs that women do may be allocated a different economic value. Being a woman or black can exclude an individual from access to resources of a group, as is the case with male dominated occupations or those defined as 'masculine', or those defined by the state as only appropriate for British nationals (such as top Civil Service jobs).

Material resource production and allocation cannot be confined to class relations alone. The term status has been suggested by some writers (e.g. Crompton 1993: 127) as 'relating to the overall structuring of inequality along a range of dimensions'. This is a position also taken by Scott (2000). However, the term status has worked in contrast, and as relational to class. In this model, class is seen to be about more concrete material or work-based inequalities, whereas status becomes a way of locating everything else, from prestige systems to citizenship rights (Lockwood 1996). Moreover, the concept of status cannot locate non-work based inequalities outside the domain of the *conditions* by which work based inequalities are

structured. For example citizenship rights may constitute a place for more than formulating the conditions for access to resources on the basis of work, but are themselves highly gendered and racialized in quite specific ways. Allocating them to the level of 'status' function cannot begin to address these issues.

Bourdieu's (1990) notion of four kinds of capital, which includes cultural and symbolic capital, treats these as aspects of *class*, so that gender and ethnicity then form part of the cultural and symbolic schema, which then enters class relations. These relations are not exclusively those of employment and occupation, as in the work of Goldthorpe (1980), Lockwood (1986) and others, but they none the less take these as the central determining component. Moreover, the focus on human capital (e.g. Gershuny 1998), found in some approaches to stratification, essentially concentrates on individual capacities and skills, as determinants of market inclusion and exclusion, and is not fully adequate either. This approach presupposes that individuals can acquire human capital attributes, without reference to the overall system of stratification, which determines which categories of persons are eligible to accomplish particular forms. Such a system includes within its very heart gendered, ethnicized and racialized relations; the experiential, intersubjective, organizational and representational features of these ontological domains are themselves constitutive of the stratification system. These are spaces where the production and reproduction of valuational and material inequalities takes place, and where relational and antagonistic social relations are embodied and performed.

Finally, it is important to point out that there is a decommodification of services in modern societies (Esping-Anderson 1990), for example in health and education. Moreover, the debate around Marshall (1963) has shown that struggles for rights to these facets of citizenship, and others, may be pursued along lines of gender, ethnicity/race as well as class. These constitute not only non-economic determinants of material inequality, but are themselves part of the process of the structuration of positions and places in modern societies. Developments in social movements and identity politics (Anthias and Yuval Davis 1992) have reinforced the importance of these modes of struggle.

Symbolic aspects of work relations include ideas that some jobs are clean and some are dirty, the former often being seen as more desirable irrespective of the economic rewards entailed as in the different valuation of white-collar versus blue-collar work or non-manual versus manual work. There are a range of resources that are gained therefore from the performance of more 'desirable' jobs that enter into an assessment of an individual's life conditions and life chances (e.g. see the arguments in Pakulski and Waters 1996; Turner 1988). This notion is also found in a different sense in the idea of clean money (gained through legitimate means) and dirty money as well as the laundering of money.

Deference is attached to some occupations, such as medicine and law. This gives the roles, and the individuals who inhabit them, authority and

to some extent control over others. For example, the medicalization of childbirth has given doctors power over women's life conditions when they are in a vulnerable condition during pregnancy and childbirth. Some occupations are given value as servicing the community; in this category we can include nurses, possibly teachers, therapists and priests. This gives them self-worth and some degree of power in determining the psychological condition of those with whom they interact professionally. This value, however, is not necessarily translated into high economic rewards, and it could be argued that incentives for these jobs are not derived from the market place (Walby 1997).

The knowledge base of some work is valued in and of itself, although professors, judges, doctors and others may be empowered through that knowledge base. This may give privileged access to knowledge, which can be translated into life conditions, such as knowledge of the best areas for good schools for their children, or the best forms of health care. The work we do may be seen as an embodiment of ourselves and provide us with self-esteem. Hence those out of work may be deprived of that self-esteem which is a pre-requisite to effective life chances and conditions, and may function to reproduce the lack of access to economic resources. Some forms of work require the objectification and depersonalization of their incumbents found in the use of uniforms by nurses, priests, judges, policemen, soldiers and others who may have authority. Such symbolic presentations of positionality reinforce the integration with existing social arrangements. There may a seeping from individuals as embodiments of social processes and individuals as human subjects. Moreover, some bureaucratic jobs are invested with authority to decide how resources should be distributed to populations and individuals, indicating that resource allocation is not only market led (Esping Anderson 1993).

Individuals may be sponsored to social places. For example, the children of doctors are more likely to be thought of as fit for medical training. Social places are not merely subject to the determination of class but of cultural and embodied social positionalities specifying types of human persons (this is especially the case with notions of gendered jobs, see Bradley 1996; Walby 1997). Meeting gendered norms is endowed with economic exchange value in the market place, as a form of skill or accomplishment. For example, pop stars may be seen as embodying desire, as icons of youth, that then assume economic value.

Some jobs and economic rewards are seen as more appropriate for some ethnic groups than for others. For example, there exists a myth of ethnic entrepreneurship in relation to Jews, Asians and Cypriots (Anthias 1992a). Ethnic resources include control over ethnic job networks, family enterprises, ethnic niches for serving their own communities, and the creation of the professional ethnic, as well as particular ways in which women may be used economically (Phizacklea 1983). White or dominant ethnicities (Gabriel 1998) have privileged access to top jobs which may rely on old school networks or other social networks and having the right cultural

knowledge or information: speaking the 'same language'. An ethnic group may have overall control over resources e.g. in their role and hegemony in relation to the state. This includes control over forms of education, or denial of access to groups who lack culturally specific forms of knowledge such as language skills (Anthias and Yuval Davis 1992).

Women are less likely to gain positions of high economic value because they are women. This is true of women from all social class backgrounds and relates to the system of gender hierarchies in a direct relationship with material inequality (Abbot 2000). The role of women in biological production limits their employability or the ease with which they can go to work. This is a result of cultural assumptions about childcare responsibilities and mothering as well as structural constraints such as inflexible work structures and poor childcare facilities (Abbott 2000; Charles 1993; Crompton and Sanderson 1990). Sexist definitions of economic value are attached to functions of mothers and housewives who are not paid nor is the job as valued as that of being employed within traditional labour markets (Glucksman 1995).

When work is feminized it becomes less materially valued; the teaching profession and the clerical profession are historically cases in point (Holcombe 1973; Walby 1986; Abbot and Wallace 1996). Moreover, the class structure and the economy may be seen as partially driven by family and sexual ideologies, for example in the gendered nature of the very definition of skill (Phillips and Taylor 1980; Cockburn 1991). Inferiorization is internalized, producing less emphasis on personal economic rewards, and a greater concern with family life and family values (Wetherall et al. 1987; Walby 1997; Abbott 2000). The consumption/life styles of gender have economic facets personified in the enormous markets for fashion and cosmetics for women, cars and technical equipment for men. Moreover, there is an economic value attached to sexual services particularly of women; both biological reproduction functions and sexuality become marketable commodities via surrogacy and prostitution and the pervasiveness of fashion icons and page three models.

From these selective but certainly not exhaustive examples it is clear that the world of work (thought of as a material sphere) is also a cultural sphere that embodies gender and ethnic difference at its very heart.

DIMENSIONS OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Having discussed some of the ways in which the material and the symbolic are related, I now want to consider three dimensions of social stratification as ways of integrating class, gender and ethnicity into an overall approach to social inequality. Firstly, social stratification may be seen in terms of outcomes relating to life conditions (see Sorenson 1998, for example). *Life conditions* describe how a person is positioned in social relations in terms of structured social *outcomes* relating to resource allocation and social

placement. Secondly, it may be seen in terms of the set of predispositions and opportunities structured by the placement of individuals within the different ontological realms: of production (class), sexual difference (gender) and collective formations (ethnicity) (Anthias 1996, 1998a). These might be thought of as the appropriate place for referring to *life chances*, which could be thought of more broadly in terms of processes of inclusion and exclusion. Life chances provide the overall *context* for the achievement of life conditions. These life chances are not produced only through the allocation of individuals to roles and positions within the productive system, but also include allocation and role within the production and reproduction of sex difference and biological reproduction (gender), and the production and reproduction of collective bonds around notions of origin and destiny (ethnicity). Therefore, although, at one level, life conditions themselves (i.e. outcomes) give rise to life chances, life chances are also determined by a range of other social relations like gender and ethnic forms of opportunities and exclusions. The third aspect of stratification is found in the dimension of *collective allegiances* and identities relating to struggle over resources. Such allegiances may be formulated around ideas of class solidarity, gender solidarity or ethnic solidarity and cannot be restricted to class based allegiances.

Such modes of organizing around resource claims may be a product of the articulation between, on the one hand, life chances (cultural predispositions and structural opportunities/exclusions) and life conditions (the actual allocation of a range of socially valued resources). The latter include the economic, the political and the symbolic/cultural. The cultural can be seen as both artifact and as the place where valuation is constituted; as a form of consumption of commodities as well as the realm in which those commodities assume social value. This is imparted to those that consume them and this figures in the construction of human worth.

There is no necessary coincidence between individuals who share life conditions, life chances and collective solidarities. However, sharing life conditions with others alerts individuals to the disjunction in their life chances. Sharing life chances (those of class, of gender or ethnicity), may alert individuals to the disjunction with life conditions, and makes more manifest systems of inequality. The solidarities formed through these manifest disjunctions may produce a range of local struggles, contestations and proclamations on the basis of organizing around the category of class, or that of ethnicity or that of gender. On the other hand, a coincidence in the individuals that share both life conditions and life chances (i.e. shared outcomes and shared exclusions/opportunities), might have the effect of naturalizing the similarity and lead to the formation of more permanent solidary groups. These may or may not result in subaltern solidarities and resource struggles of a more overarching kind and the formation of antagonistic and conflictual based groups of a more permanent type. This includes groups manifesting ethnic conflict based on exclusion or usurpation (such as white dominant groups or national liberation struggles).

A different level that is focused on by much traditional stratification theory relates to social roles or *functions* in the labour market. This is particularly the case with Marxist approaches that stress the differential role of workers and capitalists in the production system, and define this role as producing relations of exploitation. Such relations can be reconceptualized in terms of relational life chances or life conditions allocated to roles but in interplay with a range of other determinations. For example being a member of the proletariat involves a limited range of opportunities to accumulate capital and indeed, the deprivation of the full value of labour power for the worker (if we use Marx's notion of exploitation). Roles may be allocated life conditions, which focuses not on the structuration of exclusions/opportunities but on the actual allocation of rewards as positional and substantive outcomes.

The determinants of these, however, in modern societies, do not emanate strictly from production roles, but the systems of control, regulation, negotiation and contestation that surround them. These will include modes by which resource allocation and distribution are arrived at (which includes the roles of trades unions and professional associations), as well as the allocation of differential symbolic value to the roles. Marx's notion of the importance of the division between labour and capital is central in the analysis of *systems of production*, at the holistic level, but the analytical privileging of the economic cannot work in explaining the life chances, conditions or solidary formations of concrete and determinant individuals and groups. This is because other cultural, symbolic, political and juridical factors mediate the abstract level that Marx is concerned with. This also applies to the Goldthorpe analysis of employment relations as being the key to stratification relations. Such employment relations are *end products of processes but are not themselves explanations* for the allocation of resources of different kinds to individuals and groups, according to the approach that I have outlined.

CONCLUSION

The social categories of gender, race/ethnicity and class relate to outcomes of both a material and symbolic type. However, forms of subordination are complex. Recent debates in sociology have moved away from the specification of categories as unities and divisions. In the area of ethnicity and migration for example there has been an interest in what has been called transethnic, transnational and hybrid identities (Anthias 1998b). I do not have the space nor is it my aim here to explore this area. I want to note it with regard to the developments in class theory that focus on contradictory and hybrid class positions, as in the work of E.O. Wright (1985), for example, and the debates around Carchedi (1977) and Poulantzas (1973) on the lower middle classes. I want to focus on contradictory locations in a different way; as a way of connecting together class, ethnicity and gender.

Recognizing the material and symbolic facets of each enable us to do this much more effectively than in the past.

Social divisions single out specific kinds of attributes for the filling of the places. Therefore the debate about stratification as a question of *places*, and stratification as a question of population *groupings* needs to be rethought in the light of the ways the places serve to single out attributes for those to fill them, and the ways in which the attributes of those who fill the places over time, will serve to mark out the location of the places within the hierarchical system. Thus, a time/distance perspective needs to be introduced into the analysis, as the process of structuration of positions and groupings is a dynamic and relational one. Moreover, all individuals occupy places in each one of the categories, so that they are not mutually exclusive. But the attributions, psychic identifications and claims may vary greatly, some of which may be seen as forms of resistance, as well as external constructions and social attributions. To be proud to be woman/feminine, black/minority ethnic (or say disabled (Oliver 1995)) is to refuse the attribution of a hierarchical otherness. Therefore, identities are multiplex, contextual and situational.

Moreover, there is an interplay between class, gender and ethnicity within the market place; this is not only a place for class formation. Gender and ethnicity, as the earlier discussion showed, may be given the characteristics of marketable attributes in the market place. For example, where the market place requires sexual attributes, ranging from explicit sexual services like prostitution or surrogacy, to personality traits or physical traits, then gendered characteristics may sit with education or technical skills, i.e. as resources which individuals can bring to the market-place and use for determining their life chances: the human capital approach to social stratification in a sense does this, although in its traditional form has not treated gender and ethnicity in this way. In terms of ethnicity, knowledge of certain cultures, including language or other facilities to interact, may be skills that allow entry into the market and become then constitutive of class positioning.

Furthermore, in terms of social relations that are hierarchical, it is not purely a question of a hierarchy of individuals within a category, for there are complex forms of hierarchy across a range of different dimensions. If the constructs are read as 'grids', their salience will not only vary in different contexts, but the interplay of the different grids needs to be always considered in any analysis of social outcomes or effects (Anthias 1998a). The notion of social outcomes is itself a heuristic device, and not dependent on the idea of an end or fixing of a set of processes: outcomes here are like still shots which capture a particular constellation of effectivities, within a particular moment. However, outcomes can also be seen as *patterns* that indicate the *effectivity*, for individuals and groups, of social relations, endowing places and positions.

The social categories of differentiation and stratification (and I hold the view that differentiation always entails an evaluative process) involve both

processual social relations which are analytically distinct, and embodied social outcomes which are difficult to desegregate. However, through substantive analysis, it is possible to investigate how social categories may act to either mutually *reinforce* one another, or to set up *contradictory locations* for social actors (Anthias 1996, 1998a). Therefore there are two simultaneous sets of contradictory locations: those from within the very categories of class, gender and ethnicity (in the sense of conflictual social relations structured in and through antagonism, exploitation and subordination), on the one hand, and those between them (in the sense of the different places constructed for individuals by each of the ontological positionings). For example, white working-class men have a different position with respect to ethnic and gender hierarchies than with respect to class ones, when compared to black middle-class women. Contradictory and in between positions construct identities and actions that constitute important points of departure for understanding the dynamics of social stratification, on the one hand, and social integration on the other.

In this paper I have argued that it is necessary to rethink a theory of stratification away from the distinction between class as a material form of stratification, and ethnicity and gender as symbolic or cultural forms and constructs. I have argued that it is necessary to develop an analysis which is able to understand unequal *social outcomes*. Within my analysis, the social outcomes for *specific persons* and *specific constellations of persons* is a product of the interplay, within determinate time/space dimensions, of the processual features of social relations identified through the heuristic device of the ontological spheres or domains of gender, ethnicity and class.

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