THEME SECTION

**Class, community, and crisis
in post-industrial Britain**

Edited by

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Introduction: The middle class-ification of Britain

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Abstract: The articles collected in this special section of *Focaal* capture, ethnographically, a particular moment at the end of the New Labour project when the political consequences of a failure to address the growing sense of crisis among working-class people in post-industrial Britain are being felt. These new ethnographies of social class in Britain reveal not only disenchantment and disenfranchisement, but also incisive and critical commentary on the shifting and often surprising forms and experiences of contemporary class relations. Here we trace the emergence of controversies surrounding the category “white working class” and what it has come to stand for, which includes the vilification of people whose political, economic and social standing has been systematically eroded by the economic policies and political strategies of both Conservative and New Labour governments. The specificities of class discourse in Britain are also located relative to broader changes that have occurred across Europe with the rise of “cultural fundamentalisms” and a populist politics espousing neo-nationalist rhetorics of ethnic solidarity. This selection of recent ethnographies holds up a mirror to a rapidly changing political landscape in Britain. It reveals how post-Thatcherite discourses of “the individual”, “the market”, “social mobility” and “choice” have failed a significant proportion of the working-class population. Moreover, it shows how well anthropology can capture the subtle and complex forms of collectivity through which people find meaning in times of change.

Keywords: Britain, community, crisis, culture, ethnicity, multiculturalism, race, social class

Anthropologists tend not to set out to study social class, but find that it emerges as relevant in the process of investigating human collectives of other kinds (Smith 1984). Important about this is the opportunity anthropological analysis of Britain provides for reflection on the intersection of the socio-economic, political, and cultural hierarchies of class with a diverse set of

other kinds of group orderings such as kinship (e.g., Edwards 2000; Strathern 1981; Young and Wilmott 1953); community and place (Edwards et al. 2005; Evans 2007); gender (Day 2007; Green 1997; Hart 2005); race, religion and ethnicity (Alexander 1996; Banton 1955; Baumann 1996; Shaw 1988; Werbner 2002); cultural and material practices (Gillespie 1995; Miller 2008;

Wulff 2002); and parallel and co-existing political economies (Ballard 2005; Werbner 1990).

The anthropological preoccupation with persons as the emerging outcome of complex collective histories, rather than as mainly defined by the specificities of class, allows for an interrogation of what difference it makes to an analysis of human social life to bring class and capital's ordering and reordering effects in and out of focus. Ethnographic examples make possible a critique of those accounts that assume class to be always and everywhere paramount no matter what, and at the same time they allow for an interrogation of those analyses in which class is deemed to be irrelevant just because research subjects do not "talk class" or use it as a primary frame of reference.

This collection of articles looks in detail at the contours of social class as they are rendered visible and mobilized (or not), in the UK, in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Together they provide a fine-tuned analysis of the economic, political, and socio-cultural effects of change in several post-industrial neighborhoods of England and Scotland, and examine discourses that either mobilize idioms of class or transform them so as to obscure the historical significance of class for specific political purposes.

This theme section is timely for several reasons: the past two years in the UK has seen both the final demise of the New Labour project and the birth of subsequent attempts at reinvention of a new leadership and core values. This is the moment in which a Labour leader—Ed Miliband—dares to try to do again what the previous leader, Gordon Brown, was shot down for in 2008: to make room in his vocabulary for that term of collective economic and political description—"working class"—which was so dramatically stripped of its significance by the Thatcherite government of the 1980s and 1990s and then made taboo in the 2000s by New Labour. In the determination to hold the center ground the Labour government took its traditional supporters for granted, perpetuated monetarist economic policies and promoted the myth of a middle-class meritocracy, which re-

warded self-actualization, but turned out to be nothing more than a pipe dream for a significant part of the population. Even erstwhile allies of New Labour in the social sciences, such as Anthony Giddens, appeared to have been seduced during this period by the possibility of a wholesale abandonment of class as an explanatory framework for understanding the forward moving dynamics of British social life. The vision of a world in which the Third Way and increasingly reflexive individualism transcend the limits of traditional collective association failed, however, to anticipate some of the most astounding political developments of early twenty-first century Britain. The rise in popularity, over the past decade, of the far-right British National Party in England, for example, has highlighted the extent of alienation among Labour voters in the post-industrial cities of Britain. This has revealed a profound yearning and nostalgia for ties of community and ethnic group in place of what is perceived to have been lost, which is working-class respect.

The articles collected here are concerned with a growing state of crisis in some of the poorest areas of Britain's urban neighborhoods. The ethnographic analyses reveal the extent of a growing sense of disenchantment and disenfranchisement and provide a context for greater understanding of the widespread riots in English cities in August 2011. This period of unrest has focused further national attention on what has arguably been neglected for the past thirty years of British politics, which is the experience of life of a neglected post-industrial working class (Jones 2011). More specifically the heterogeneity of case study material presented here, about what it is like to be working class in Britain at the beginning of the twenty-first century, interrogates a relatively recent discursive move in the cultural politics of Britain, namely a reframing of the working class as homogeneous and white. It is salutary to trace precisely when and for what purposes the racial epithet "white" was conjoined with "working class" when few people, if any, use the term to identify themselves and when, over the same period, neither the idiom of "white middle class" nor

“black or Asian working class” or, indeed, “multiracial working class” gained the same traction.

“White Working Class”

Gillian Evans (2007; see also this volume) argues that the emergence of the category “white working class” is symptomatic of a complex combination of factors relating to thirty years of British political and socio-economic history. First, it speaks of the malaise typical of those predominantly working-class neighborhoods and communities of Britain that were politically, economically, and culturally dispossessed by processes of de-industrialization in the 1980s and 1990s, exacerbated by Thatcherite policies. Second, it relates to the efforts of New Labour to continue to de-politicize the working class and recruit them to a mission of individualized aspiration and social mobility, which, after the dispossession of the Thatcher years, was perceived to be a greater betrayal and seen as the abandonment of the working class by its own leaders. As New Labour moved toward the center ground and confidently courted the middle class vote, it declared in 1998: “We’re all middle-class now”. But, unsurprisingly, not everyone agreed. Despite current misgivings about academic use of the term, which risks reifying a problematic category of classification, the materialization of the concept “white working class” is arguably critical to a public and academic debate that forcibly reintroduces the idea of the ongoing existence of the working class in defiance of the twenty-first century middle class-ification of Britain. Third, it is important to understand that the emergence of the idea of the working class as “white” is a reflection of the fact that while the Labour movement has been gradually undermined, the self-organizing ethnic collectives of multiculturalism have remained politically and economically viable and are a legitimate means for black and Asian people in Britain to struggle for greater racial equality and harness economic resource from the state. Despite the controversies of the Rushdie Affair and the terrorist bombings of 9/11 and

7/7, the Labour government’s support for multiculturalism was strong and community life for black and Asian people living in relatively poor neighborhoods was configured *not* through language pertaining to the socio-economic commonalities of a multiracial British working class, but through dominant discourses of racial, ethnic, and cultural distinctiveness (Baumann 1996).¹ Thus, as long as it is not discursively possible to imagine the collectives that define black and Asian life in Britain as also working class, the working class becomes, by definition, white.

The anthropology of Britain

Anthropological studies in Britain that have focused mainly on black and Asian migrants from Commonwealth countries have also tended to concentrate on racial, ethnic, and cultural distinctiveness. Where the classed contours of race and ethnicity have become relevant this has rarely translated into either an explicit anthropological position on race relations in Britain (Mills 2008) or a public discourse about the black or Asian working classes in Britain. And despite the fact that there is an increasingly multiracial “youth culture” which transcends distinctions of class and race, and which is constituted through shared forms of language (Hewitt 1986; Wulff 1988) and consumption, such as musical appreciation (see Cohen 2007; Evans 2006), there has been relatively less anthropological focus either on everyday relations between white, black, and Asian residents of particular urban neighborhoods or between the working and middle classes except perhaps in the specific ethnographies of places of work (Cassidy 2002; Mollona 2009; Ouroussoff 1993). Notable exceptions include Katharine Tyler (2003) on the articulation of ideas of whiteness, coloniality and social class across rural and urban locales in Britain; Susan Benson (1982) on “interracial marriage” in 1970s Brixton; Sandra Wallman and Ian Buchanan (1982) on the development of a proud multicultural community in Battersea, London; and Georgie Wemyss (2009) on

the hidden histories of black and Asian workers at the heart of the working-class community in London's docklands. Two articles in this theme section contribute to this literature. Penny Howard examines workplace cosmopolitanism, and its limits, among Scottish fisherman, and Jan Grill explores the relations between Slovakian Roma and white working-class residents of a neighborhood in post-industrial Glasgow. The inter-relatedness found in these and other studies confounds the proliferation of distinct ethnic classifications such as those made manifest in the multitude of British population surveys that make diversity in Britain appear to be the sole preserve of black and Asian people and that, by default, lend an unfounded and imaginary homogeneity to white British-ness (Evans 2010).

Anthropological studies that have focused on white people in Britain have, however, undermined the imagined homogeneity of white Britishness, particularly with respect to differences of class and territorial affiliation. For example, Ronnie Frankenberg's (1957) ethnography of a mining village in North Wales in the 1950s showed sharp divisions, made locally, between insiders and outsiders, and this division is repeated over again in subsequent ethnographic examples from Britain (e.g., Edwards 2000; Rapport 1993; Strathern 1981). Anthony Cohen (2005: 608) writes this, retrospectively, about Frankenberg's classic ethnography:

"At the core of his analysis of Pentreduwaith, a remote and declining North Wales valley community divided by language, denomination, gender and kinship, was class. The key discriminant between the relatively powerless and egalitarian village men—who were forced to travel long distances to work outside the village and the valley—and those who they believed to occupy positions of power and authority was economic power and all that went with it. This was not a restatement of the more stereotypical rural hierarchies of landowners and the rest, or even of a petty squirearchy. Rather, on the one side were self-employed businessmen, salaried

executives and white-collar employees; on the other were the wage labourers. The former were regarded as outsiders, a characterisation underlined by the prevalence among them of English as their first or sole language; on the other were the villagers ('insiders'), most of whom spoke Welsh as their first language. Interestingly, this latter group might include the doctor (if he was local) and the Baptist ('Chapel') minister. It was likely to exclude the teachers and the Anglican ('Church') minister (although the incumbent in Frankenberg's time was a Welsh-speaker)."

Cohen points to a layered, always local, analysis of class, which does not map directly onto a straightforward division between working and middle-class residents (and this is before, or without, consideration of how Pentreduwaith women experience, narrate, or contextualize class). He suggests a shifting and mobile class sensibility which more recent anthropological studies of Britain also highlight (Edwards 2000; Evans 2007; Rapport 2002). Now that the idea of locality (Savage et al. 2004; see also Edwards this volume), nation (Glick Schiller 2006), and heritage (Macdonald 1997) are widely understood to be the constantly reworked product of globalization, transnational connection and global flows of both information technology and capital, rather than the straightforward expression of primordial belonging, it may be that "neighborhood" as the site of multiple kinds of residency, sociality and group collectivity, might better serve the analytical purposes of cross-cultural comparison than ethnic group or working-class community have so far allowed in the anthropological study of Britain.

Alas, few anthropological studies of the British upper classes exist (for a notable exception, see Crewe 2007) and only a few focus specifically on the middle classes (see, e.g., Eade 2002; Firth, Hubert, and Forge 1969). More studies are needed on emergent and developing relations between upper-, middle-, and working-class people, and between black, white, and Asian people, living in both rural and urban neighborhoods.

Middle class and ethnic

Although black and Asian activists of the 1970s and 1980s had perceived themselves to be black *and* working class (Ramdin 1987), by the 2000s it was clear that the fight for racial equality through multiculturalism had become discursively unhooked from a Labour movement that no longer spoke the language of the working classes. Evans (this volume) explains how, by default, this left a significant number of working-class white people in a political vacuum. Not only did their whiteness not matter in multiculturalism, but also their working class self-identification no longer mattered to New Labour. Rather than being renowned as the primary movers against unfair hierarchies in Britain, working-class white people became perceived, ironically, as a block to equality. This was either because many among them were resisting what it means to become equally middle class in contemporary Britain or because they were competing against black and Asian people for scarce resources in impoverished post-industrial neighborhoods and, as a result, were publically labeled as outmoded and racist.

It seemed, by the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, that the only way to be a viable person in Britain was to be middle class or “ethnic” and for the majority of British people this appeared to be an ideological and pragmatic bargain they could live with. However, for a minority of working-class people who either lacked the financial, educational, and social capital for self-contained individual success (and were culturally blamed, by Conservative politicians, for being resolutely “underclass” and the cause of Britain’s “broken” moral economy), or who could imagine nothing worse than being identified as or self-identifying as middle-class, it came to seem as though the only way to fight back, was either to reclaim, redefine and revitalize the Labour movement or start to learn, through the rhetoric of multiculturalism, “how to have a cultural identity”. By implication, this meant having to learn how to compete against black and Asian people for eth-

nic self-respect, dignity, and community resources. Evans sees an example of this in Bermondsey where civic leaders have gone to considerable lengths to organize and seek funding for an annual music festival. They perceive their task, in part, to be about demonstrating the viability of Bermondsey “culture” by competing against the Latin American and black music festivals for funds and audience numbers. This does not mean that the line-up of acts in the Bermondsey music event is not racially diverse; it is just that multiculturalism, in this context, is not about multi as in everyone coming together, but rather about diverse groups learning to compete against other “cultures” for self respect and community resources. This raises the question, and not just for Bermondsey, of when and in what situations the fluidity and interrelatedness (described above in terms of collectivities around music, kinship, and work) morphs into reified and fixed ethnic boundaries and vice versa. As the contributors to this theme section show these are not mutually exclusively (either/or) collectivities, but rather co-existing ones, implicated in each other, and mobilized for different purposes.

There are two inherent problems for working-class white people in the ethnic diversification of the working class. First, ethnicity is popularly associated with the racial and cultural difference of black and Asian people and second, white people’s culture is dominantly associated with the “high culture” of white middle and upper class distinction. This means there are few things about white working-class life that are recognized as either properly ethnic or properly cultural and consequently publically valued. As a consequence, the efforts of working-class white people to claim legitimate ethnic and cultural distinction for themselves are often either pitied and defended (by misguided public champions) or mocked and publically derided as a national disgrace (see Skeggs 2009).²

This does not go unnoticed by the people who feel that their lifestyles are not publicly valued. As Shawn explains to Katherine Smith

(this volume), classing people entails judgment and classing them as working-class entails negative judgments. Shawn is well aware of what meanings are currently getting packed into the appellation working class. His strategy is to refuse to be classified. Jeanette Edwards (this volume) also writes about working-class responses to the constant and invidious misrepresentations and misreadings of the English working classes. Residents of northern English towns, which have been left relatively untouched by the busy urban regeneration of neighboring cities, display an astute awareness of histories of injury and dispossession (see also Harrison 2011). The hidden histories they excavate, however, provide readings of class that run against the grain. They manufacture histories of labor replete with dignity and pride and which show the vagaries and accidents of social class. Their reworking of history and reimaginings of the past render visible a richer, more textured and nuanced present than the flat and monochrome images of the “white working class” currently in circulation. Their research uncovers the “hidden histories of dispossession, disenfranchisement and subalternity” that Don Kalb (2011) calls for and, in so doing, posits alternatives.

The sense of insult and injustice that vilification gives rise to is to be explained by emphasizing that for working-class white people to imagine themselves as a new “ethnic other” relative not only to black and Asian people, but also to white middle-class people, is not only to strip class of its political and economic connotations, making it seem like the difference between the classes is now simply a cultural one, but also to make working-class white people feel other to a nation that they defiantly perceive to be their own. It is important to note here the difference between England, where these discursive moves vis-à-vis the white working class are more obviously played out and contested, and Scotland where working-class pride remains strong even among the middle classes who tend to respect their working-class histories and where socialist politics remains visible.³

The Far Right

These examples from Britain are to be understood in relation to broader changes globally and in Europe. For example, Verena Stolcke (1995) describes as “cultural fundamentalism” the replacement of the idea of “racial difference” with “cultural distinctiveness” which is the new modality for inclusion and exclusion in the European polity (see Taylor 2009). Anthropologists have also turned their attention to the rise of ethnic and religious neo-nationalism across Europe and to the upsurge of populist parties that have been more or less successful in national and local elections (e.g., Gingrich and Banks 2006; Kalb 2011)⁴ and Douglas Holmes (2010) explains the shifting politics of race and class across Europe as a reaction to the transformational effects of what he describes as “fast capital”. For Kalb (2011: 1), the growing influence in Europe of “working class neo-nationalism is the ... traumatic expression of material and cultural experiences of dispossession and disenfranchisement”. A common concern in the narrative of urban decline has been the distribution and allocation of state resources. Loïc Wacquant has pointed out how, in American and French cities, “the new urban” questions of “joblessness, housing degradation, violence, isolation and immigration” produced new “fantastical discourses” about the “black working class” (1993: 130–132).⁵

In this theme section, too, contributors are interested in the relationships between neo-nationalism and the post-industrial, post-socialist demise of a localized politics of and for the working classes. In Britain, the concept of class has been characterized by ambivalence toward its social, economic, and political implications, and urban decline and distribution of resources have also become racialized processes. This ambivalence has been coupled with a general sense of politicians’ irresponsibility as public sector services and living conditions in many urban areas in Britain have deteriorated.

Addressing the emergence and influence of the far-right British National Party (BNP) in

England, both Evans and Smith explore the emergence of an economic and political void, the sense of a lack of cultural legitimacy experienced by working-class white voters and the attempts of the BNP to engineer an ethnic politics of visceral cultural nationalism. James Rhodes (2010) has made clear that a significant proportion of BNP voters in Britain are white, male, over thirty-five, skilled or semi-skilled workers who are inhabitants of post-industrial, formerly Labour stronghold areas of the country characterized by Bengali, Pakistani, or black African immigration and affected by socio-economic deprivation. In line with Evans's analysis (this volume) of the reasons for alienation from Labour socialism of the more well to do members of the white working class, Rhodes (2010) explains the relevance of self-made distinctions between kinds of working-class white people to the phenomenon of growing support for the BNP. Katherine Smith shows how residents of Higher Blackley in Manchester dread the BNP and are astutely aware of the politics of hatred they pedal but are, nevertheless, tempted to vote for them—precisely because of the gap they are perceived to fill at the heart of a British politics which has alienated the public and is desperately trying to reinvent itself.

The articles in this volume both support and depart from this reading of the potentially neo-nationalist tendencies of the contemporary moment, showing evidence of a range of other responses to post-industrial malaise. The diversity of analyses presented here shows above all that it is a mistake to “lump” the “white working classes” together and assume that they will respond to contemporary political, social, and economic challenges in the same way. This raises the question of what anthropologists interested in “class” see when they describe, ethnographically, or otherwise, the contemporary workings of class. What translation exercise is being performed when they understand class as a defining and structuring force in people's lives, but when the people they study refuse class-ification? What is the relationship between a political and economic awareness of capital and its disguises

and the way in which people understand, experience and perform classed positions, which they may, also, roundly reject?

The case studies

Not surprisingly, the contemporary moment in British cultural politics feels, for some, like a crisis of belonging. This theme section addresses this crisis. It demonstrates the emerging tension between race, class, ethnicity, and culture in Britain and reveals the highly specific and unpredictable ways in which people living in post-industrial neighborhoods are surviving, resisting, and giving meaning to the particular challenges they face in contemporary times.

Taking each article in turn and in the order in which they appear, we begin with Evans's analysis of the exclusionary ethnic rhetoric of the British Nationalist Party (BNP), which mobilizes the language of post-colonial indigeneity and attempts to identify and isolate a white population perceived to be losing out to the foreigner, the immigrant, the non-white. Evans relates this strategizing to a broader shift in the structure of British sociality away from the broader collective of class and toward a preoccupation with ethnic and cultural distinction. Evans explains how for the BNP there is little mileage to be gained by pointing to the shared socio-economic positions of working-class white, black and Asian British people, and their potential solidarities are unhelpful to the BNP cause. Thus while the BNP appeals implicitly to the British working class as builders (literally) of nation and “the salt of the earth” and therefore legitimate and rightful heirs to the country's resources, it explicitly forbids a class discourse or analysis of its membership and the BNP's focus on “ethnic” over-communication obscures class domination (Eade 2002). Evans explains the alienation of more well to do white working-class voters from Labour socialism and shows how, in Bermondsey, through the appeal of politics as patronage, a politician seen to have local interests at heart deflected the

claims of the BNP to speak and act on behalf of the “downtrodden”, marginalized, and disenfranchised majority.

Smith’s article also touches on the BNP from a different angle. She looks at the narratives and local events that occurred around the by-elections in May 2007 and the general elections in May 2010 in Higher Blackley, North Manchester, and describes how local people felt that their vote in such elections no longer mattered. What did matter, however, was whether or not voters supported the BNP. The BNP came a close second to the winning Labour Party in 2007 and fourth place in the general elections of 2010 for this constituency, but Smith could not always be sure from her conversation with individuals in Higher Blackley of who actually voted for the BNP. Smith’s concern is less about why people would or would not vote for the BNP, and more about how, more generally, working-class people have come to feel that they do not matter. How these sentiments play out in the ways in which people participate in democracy is not, Smith argues, a reflection of already existing prejudices, but rather, a “safe” and noticeable expression of the anxieties and experiences of white working-class residents. She explores both the campaign messages of the BNP and the Labour Party as they were calculated to catch the imagination of a particular sort of voter and she juxtaposes political messages with how everyday life experiences influence the ways in which persons participate in democracy. At the center of her analysis is the social concept of “fairness”. People in Higher Blackley not only have a strong sense of “being ignored” in a “multicultural Britain” but also consider government and bureaucracy highly unfair because of how they mis-represent “working class”, “white”, “English” or “inner city” people.

The conditions through which the rhetoric of blame is articulated become more complicated as we describe the landscapes imagined within these claims and the interconnections that are created and circulated. Jan Grill focuses on a relatively small group of recent immigrants, Slovakian Roma, to Poundhill, a run-

down working-class neighborhood of Glasgow that has over the years absorbed different immigrant groups and prides itself on its multiculturalism. He shows how the attention paid to Roma as “the problem” displaces the responsibility of both local and national government for the dilapidation of inner-city areas. If people are experiencing the effects of high unemployment, a shortage of decent affordable housing, overstretched education and other public and health services, a focus on the Roma deflects attention away from social policies, which at best perpetuate and at worst exacerbate the degradation.

Grill unpacks an intriguing story of how Slovakian Roma emerged as “one of the most contested migrant groups on a socio-symbolic map of Glasgow”. From being just one of a number of Eastern European populations that moved to Britain after the accession of new EU member states in 2004 and unmarked as “Eastern European”, the Roma got to be “discovered” after being relatively content not to self-identify as Roma. They were “outed” mainly through the previous knowledge of Roma that Slovakian and Czech non-Roma immigrants brought to bear in their work as interpreters. The “socio-cultural baggage” that educated Czech and Slovak citizens brought with them to the UK included the opinion that the Roma were the most problematic minority in their countries of origin. Once the Roma were singled out as potential challenges for health, education, and social services it was a small step for them to be linked to the decline of the neighborhood. Unlike the Roma, the Scottish working-class residents of Poundhill see themselves as “stuck”, unable to leave or escape the “stigmatized neighborhood”: the area with a worsening public image which they cannot control. Like the Scottish fishermen, described by Howard (this volume), they oscillate between embracing the wider public and political discourse of who is to blame and resisting the collective representation of Poundhill as a problem.

Waged and unemployed people in Britain are starkly aware of the way in which both globalization and EU expansion have put different kinds of pressures on existing resources in a

time of cuts to jobs and public spending. Their commentary is an economic analysis of changing patterns and conditions of labor. Howard reports on Scottish workers in the fishing, oil, and shipping industries, and her article provides an important antidote to arguments that congeal the “white working class” as homogeneous and racist. Howard writes of a working-class cosmopolitanism developed through the international connections forged by Scottish seafarers who have traveled widely and who share the same experiences of harsh and precarious working conditions with seafarers from other parts of the world. The men with whom Howard worked both empathize with, and distance themselves from, foreign workers who are paid less than Scottish workers. Though they decry Filipino workers, say, for compromising the working conditions in the Scottish fishing industry, they also celebrate and emphasize the ties that link them. Howard identifies a working class cosmopolitanism engendered over time through a long history of labor migration from Scotland to many parts of the world. The knowledge that Scottish seafaring families have of other parts of the world, concretized in their collection and display of foreign artifacts and memorabilia, is today augmented by incoming labor: by Filipino, Romanian and Portuguese fishermen, for example, and Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian service workers. The Scottish fishing industry is suffering: there are enough jobs to go around, but costs and competition have increased, resulting in work that is increasingly more casual and temporary and outsourced to foreign crew on low wages. Howard cites one young man who has worked on twenty-two different boats and argues that boat owners are now getting “two men for half the price of one”. However his and his compatriots’ response to the threats they perceive from incoming labor are multifaceted and go beyond simply blaming the foreign worker for their plight. Howard argues that sympathy and empathy, built on the experiences of travel and of working in harsh conditions, alongside people from different nationalities, transcend difference. Of interest here is how Scottish laborers also point to a

shared experience of struggle against colonial powers, in this case the English. Paul Basu (2007) identifies something similar in the narratives of white Australians who are searching for their homelands in Scotland from which, they say, their ancestors were forcibly expelled.

For Howard, acts of solidarity cross “gulfs of global economic inequality”. This is important in the light of what we know about the expansion, through globalization, of “the global working class” (Kalb 2011) and of how the heterogeneity of wage-dependent classes is as pronounced as ever. The articles in this theme section provide British examples of both global and neo-liberal processes and forces, but they also point to less predictable responses and show how neo-nationalist populism is not the only show in town. Smith, for example, describes how individuals reject the “bundling” effect of being labeled “working class”. Paradoxically, the hierarchical and ideological underpinnings of classed identities in Higher Blackley are rejected in some contexts in order to afford a freedom of movement between class categories, and used in others to demonstrate a moral commitment to belonging, and being seen to belong, to the area. This raises the vexed political question of who has the power to define and to represent the working classes (Urciuoli 1993) at a time when their capacity to represent themselves in British public life has been profoundly undermined.

For both Grill and Howard, Althusser’s notion of “interpellation” proves useful for understanding “multiple subjectivities”. For Althusser (1972) “individuals are always, already subjects”: ideological state apparatuses, including kinship, political and economic institutions, have already, pre-birth, constituted the person, albeit in different ways. Grill and Howard’s ethnographic examples play on the duplex that Althusser acknowledges between the passive and involuntary subjectivities into which people are “hailed” (fixity) and the potential to orientation rejection, defiance, and resistance around ideological and dominant callings (mobility). Of interest here are the ways in which people dismantle, problematize and challenge the iden-

tities attached to them. This theme continues with Edwards's article on family history and genealogical research (*family treeing*) which also focuses on ideas of mobility and fixity and shows how people not only excavate hidden histories but also reclaim dignity from laboring pasts and challenge crass assumptions of the "chattering classes" about the paucity of working-class culture.

Edwards argues that family treeing renders social class a more arbitrary and contingent phenomenon than the common political, academic and public understandings outlined above might allow for. Her focus on family treeing highlights the value of participant observation, which lends itself to in-depth accounts of how humans come to understand and experience themselves to be particular kinds of people. For anthropologists of Britain, this means that class is not always visible: it comes sharply in and out of view and to fix it long enough to pay close analytical attention, requires screening out (albeit temporarily) the competing ways in which people know their place in the world. An ethnographic focus on the experience of what collective distinctions are like to live through and embody, intersects with, compliments and critiques the "cultural turn" in the sociology of class in Britain (Devine et al. 2004), which signifies a shift in focus from the means of economic and political production to lifestyle, identity, consumption, behaviors, habits, appetites and desires. Edwards shows how an anthropology of social class in Britain can bring balance to and complicate the more quantitative findings of sociological analyses, which in the most recent versions of the "cultural turn" explain class relations as a relative set of specific cultural proclivities (Bennett et al. 2009), but which could not necessarily anticipate the value to English working class individuals of family treeing as a significant enthusiasm in the face of profound economic change. Edwards's analysis raises concern more generally about the shift from class to culture which replaces the "old model" of class—where individuals were imagined as moving between classes that were fixed

(Strathern 1981)—with a model that fixes persons more firmly into classes circumscribed and bounded by behavior, appearance, preferences and desires. The danger in the "cultural turn" is that classes are perceived to move, morph, blend and mutate, while persons are fixed in class categories not of their own making.

Anthropology's historical engagement with class can be characterized as a movement away from viewing it only as a structured and stratifying dimension of social life toward understanding the creative and embodied relationships that are forged in relation to and out of class categories. For Raymond Smith (1984: 467), anthropology's contribution to the discussion of class was in its "recognition that societies are differentially 'inserted' into the world system" and in its insistence on "ethnographic specificity". Previous critiques and debates about the role of social class as an analytical category centered on the disconnection between ideology and material reality, the uncertainty of statistical analysis for an anthropological readership whose focus was on the relationship between action and meaning, cultural differences, and the multidimensional nature of social life (Smith 1984). The cultural "stuff" which lies beyond class, was taken as a response to the reductionism of class analysis (Kalb and Tak 2005: 2). But more recent critique has focused on the "cultural turn" (for which read also post-structuralist or post-modern) which according to some commentators has not only deflected our attention from broader social and political imperatives but has curbed anthropology's capacity to address and intervene in pressing questions at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

In response to what he sees as the tendency on the part of anthropologists to misrecognise class consciousness—"we have defined what it is, then looked for it", Sider (1996: 75) notes: "we cannot define or mobilize what we have called working-class people by any other means than through their sense of history—of the connections between past, present, and impending future, and their connections to each other—

expressed not simply as abstract ideas but through their actual social relations of work and daily life”.

The articles in this theme section do just that: they provide ethnographic examples of how working-class people in Britain express connections between past, present and future through quotidian social relations of work and leisure. It joins other recent anthropological analyses of class that do not play off structures of feeling, for example, against material forces of history. Susana Narotzky and Gavin Smith (2006) call for a double-plied approach: a focus on the material forces of capitalist production which create particular kinds of places, and the experiences and self-definitions of people in the localities in which they live. For them “place-ness” emerges from the tension, the entanglement, between subjective sentiments of belonging and material forces of social reproduction.

The articles in this theme section, taken together, show a similar tacking between these two poles. While class is just one of a number of braided strands of self-identity and is not always mobilized as a significant mode of self-classification, the material effects of expanding global, diverse and flexible working classes impact on lives lived locally. Although the people who feature in these articles often identify more with places, pasts and patronyms than they do with discrete, bounded and named classes, they are also acutely aware of the flows of global capital, the very real effects of accumulation by dispossession, and recognize the experience of the “underdog” be they Slovakian Roma or Filipino fishermen. At the same time, however, changes over time in economic and political activity have not produced consistencies in the associations people may make between their own circumstances, how they think about them, and the circumstances of others. Running through these articles is an inter-digitation between the classed experiences of people as they negotiate the difficult terrain of post-industrial Britain and the social, economic, and political forces that shape their senses of security, dignity, anxiety and anger about the apparent indifference

or ineffectiveness of the middle and upper classes.

Acknowledgments

This special section is one outcome of a panel titled “In-migration, indigeneity and imagination: Or class, community and crisis in Europe”, held at the biennial conference of the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) in Maynooth, Ireland in 2010. The editors thank Andre Gingrich, Auksuolė Čepaitienė, Katharina Bodirsky, Alejandro Miquel, and Leonore Phillips for their contributions to the panel; the audience for prescient comments; and the editors of *Focaal* for their interest and support in taking it further.

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Notes

1. We should note here that any gains made are currently threatened by the present government's attack on “state multiculturalism”, which

David Cameron has publicly blamed for weakening “our collective identity”.

2. This lack of legitimate public value for working class white people in Britain has been symbolized over the last decade by the popularization of much-heard and uncensored epithets such as “white scum” or “chav”.
3. The difference between England and Scotland clearly warrants further attention, but for present purposes and with a word limit in mind, we merely note that Scotland has its own “ethnic” discourse relating to land and “native” forms of agrarian production such as crofting.
4. As we write this, the latest significant result comes from Finland where the True Fins increased the number of their parliamentary seats from five to thirty-nine, making them the third largest party in their country.
5. Processes of regeneration and degeneration couched in terms of “ghettoization” and “gentrification” clearly point to intersections of race and class.

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