# 1

# INTRODUCTION

## Class, older persons, and later life

No single idea in social science has either an older lineage or more constant presence than 'class'. Nevertheless, its definition has always been an enormous bone of contention. The dominant view is that class refers to relationships derived from the way humans produce goods and services. Consequently, the objective class position of actors is generally hinged upon either their relationships to the mode of production or upon their levels of 'life chances' as derived from their occupations. This position is currently being challenged by new theories of class which argue that the coming of a 'late' phase of modernity necessitates a reworking of the class concept based upon the inter-relationship of the 'economic' and the 'social'. Class relationships, according to this view, arise from the distribution of resources derived from production such as wealth and income, as well as from cultural assets such as differing educational qualifications, bodily deportments, and lifestyles.

This book takes this debate surrounding class research to another level by exploring an area of study which to-date remains seriously neglected - that is, that interface between class and later life. The sociology of class is firmly located in, and around, the younger and adult 'territories' of the life course. Although stratification studies have taken "considerable pains to examine the interplay between gender and class, and to a lesser extent between ethnicity and class, very little has been made of the articulation of age and class" (Egerton and Savage, 2000 : 24). Older persons are generally excluded from empirical research on the belief that their class-related characteristics are not sufficiently unique to undermine the logic of class analysis. When necessary, the class position of older persons is commonly located through their final occupations before retirement. Whilst this strategy may have been valid in the past when most individuals died either before or soon after statutory retirement age,

nowadays it is surely limiting to assume that one's class career terminates with the onset of retirement considering that the latter normally signals the start of a 'third age' phase of life. In fact, ethnographical studies denote clearly how the onset of later life thrusts individuals into a way of life that is qualitatively different from that experienced in midlife (Gubrium and Holstein, 2000). Gerontology also conveys poor attention to the relationship between class and later life. Though one finds many studies focusing on the class background of human ageing, the arbitrary implementation of either Marxist or Weberian standpoints on one hand, and uninformed operationalisation of class locations in later life on the other, inform us of only the extent that older persons conform to middle-aged norms rather than shedding light on the unique character of gerontological class relations. As Estes (1999 : 23) remarked, there is "confusion and ambiguity in the analysis of aging and class…gerontology from a political economy perspective demands attention to social class; nevertheless, work on the topic is surprisingly underdeveloped". Of course, sociologists of the life course have always been attentive towards the relation between class and later life. Yet, studies refrained from investigating the demographic aspects of class formation, and thus, remained negligent of the strategies and mechanisms through which class generates and reproduces intra-cohort inequalities in retirement. The argument by prominent gerontologists of how industrial societies have reached a period of 'reflexive modernisation' or 'postmodernity' in which class has little to no importance served as yet another obstacle towards the growth of a detailed programme of gerontological class research.

*Class Dynamics in Later Life* discusses the findings of a research initiative seeking to construct, theoretically and empirically, a map of class structuring and action amongst older persons. As the term 'dynamics' in the title indicates, the primary concern was not to fit older persons in a particular class schema. The ambition to construct a map of class positions was only pursued as a means to an end, to investigate if, and how, 'new' classes emerge following retirement, and the impact that later life has on subjects' role in the class system. In other words, this book endeavours to investigate the extent that older persons, despite their estrangement from the productive process, are still dynamically engaged in class structuring and action. It included five objectives, each reflecting the themes of class structure, class formation, class consciousness, class

struggle, and gender respectively : (i) examining whether class positions of older persons arise as structural residues of past occupations, (ii) studying the typical assumption that class formation in later life runs parallel to patterns found in midlife, (iii) examining the patterns of relationship between age- and class-levels of consciousness/ identification, (iv) investigating the character of class practice in later life and see whether class mobility is possible without persons re-entering the labour market, and finally, (v) embedding these intentions in a gender dimension.

**The empirical universe**

This research publication was grounded in an interpretative framework which used life-history interviews as its instrument for data collection. Its empirical universe consisted of the Maltese archipelago which contains three islands, Malta (246 sq. km), Gozo (67 sq. km), and Comino (2.6 sq. km.) situated in the Mediterranean Sea. At the end of 2007, population stood at 410,290 with as much as 394,830 persons living in Malta (NSO, 2008). Malta was chosen as the empirical setting as it offered the best level of cultural accessibility and convenience due to the fact that I am Maltese and have lived in Malta for most of my life. The island is no exception to either class inequalities or population ageing. As observed by Giddens (1994), Malta's class map has evolved from a more traditional set-up to a class structure similar to those found in other industrial societies by including both the traditional working class as well as 'new' middle class groupings. At the same time, the age-sex distribution of the Maltese population is following global demographic changes by evolving out of the traditional 'pyramidical' shape to an even-shaped 'block' distribution with equal numbers at each age cohort except at the very top (Vassallo et al., 2002).

Despite its diminutive size, Malta is not 'the island where time stood still!'. The *Malta Values Study* noted that a statistically significant segment of the Maltese population holds a reflexive and post-materialist view towards their everyday life and social surroundings (Abela, 2006). During the past two decades predominant traditional values of a relatively homogenous, patriotic, religious, and intolerant society have increasingly made way for individualised values of self-determination and

personal autonomy. Indeed, all the press - especially *The Times* (Malta) - include a steady number of thoughtful and critical letters to the editors. Radio stations provide another outlet for discursive discussion with phone-in and debate programmes featuring abundantly. One can also witness a sharp rise in secularisation from the increasing rates of marital separation and cohabitation, as well as from the fact that only just about half the population attend Mass on Sunday despite that 98% of the Maltese population are baptised in the Roman Catholic religion (Discern, 2006). Malta also includes a healthy dose of social movements seeking to protect and advance the interests of subaltern groups such as gays/lesbians and disabled. Civil society is emerging as a new political force, with NGOs and *ad hoc* citizen action groups becoming increasingly successful in challenging poorly conceived government and private development projects.

Sociologists also note a clear shift away from 'frugality', 'thrift', and 'sobriety', and towards a propensity to consume. Together with a distinct increase in household earnings (from 1,157 to 2,443 million euros in the 1988-2000 period), statistics show that the proportion of consumption dedicated to 'necessities' and 'recreation' also decreased and increased (respectively) significantly in recent years (Cassar and Cordina, 2001). In the 1990s private consumption expenditure accounted for around 75% of GDP, the purchasing power of households in Malta rose by 50%, and household saving nearly fell by half (ibid.). Thus, what was traditionally said about the Maltese being a nation of savers has been abruptly contradicted, and it is no wonder that recent decades have seen main roads transformed into shopping avenues plus the emergence of several shopping mall centres (Sultana, 1994a). Such socio-economic changes have also exposed certain strata of the population to the problems of poverty and social exclusion (Government of Malta, 2004). In 2003, it was estimated that 15% of the general population was at risk of poverty with specific at-risk-of-poverty rates being estimated at 55% for single parents, 50% for unemployed, 29% for persons in rented lodging, 21% for children (0-15 years), and 18% for retired persons.

**Book outline**

Following this introduction, chapter two and three include the literature review. Chapter two informs the reader of the contextual background of the sociology of class by conducting an appraisal the contemporary issues facing class research. It thus discusses the neo-Marxist and neo-Weberian traditions, the 'death-of-class' debate, and the 'cultural' turn in class research. Chapter three focuses on the interface between class and later life as it examines the 'derivative' rationale, class and economic differentiation, and the age stratification and 'cultures of ageing' standpoints. Whilst the aim of chapter two is to delineate a class research programme that is successful in grappling with the special character of class relations as they arise in late modernity, chapter three seeks to sensitise such a programme to the unique dimensions of later life.

Chapters four, five and six present and discuss the data in the attempt of achieving the study's objectives. Chapter four highlights how the older Maltese community incorporates three distinct classes. This chapter provides an outline of each class, as well as any inherent class factions, by focusing on their internal mechanisms as reflected in the respective class cultures and habitus. Focusing on issues relating to class consciousness and identification, chapter five examines older persons' images of the class hierarchy, the psychic and subjective effects of class structuring, and the different trajectories of social mobility. Chapter six points how older persons have become less inclined to pursue their class interests through 'collective' strategies of class struggle, whilst showing an inclination to engage in class practice through the manipulation of both social capital and consumer behaviour.

Chapter seven brings this book to a close by focusing on the analytical issues arising during the discussion, and highlighting its contributions, limitations, and any implications for future research. The only appendix at the end of the book provides information on the research procedures and strategies underlying the empirical part of the project.

# 2

# CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN CLASS RESEARCH

## The background context

The word ‘class’ derives from the Latin *classis* which had two meanings in Roman times : an armed gathering, and divisions of the Roman people according to their estates and age. Class entered the English language only in the seventeenth century where it was first used to refer to a ship or distribution of people according to their several Degrees. Following the further development of capitalist society the term began being used to designate a person’s place in society, reflecting the fact that capitalist economy was based on manufacture, and characterised by a series of conflicting demands between employers and employees.

Marx perceived such conflict to be grounded in the economy and defined classes as groupings of individuals holding similar relationships to the means of production. Marx identified two key classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Whilst the former owned the means of production, the latter owned nothing except their labour power which they sold to the bourgeoisie in return for a wage. Following his belief that “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles”, Marx (and Engels, 1967 : 79) foresaw a bloody upheaval that would change the world for ever. This analysis was founded on two tenets. First, the ‘labour theory of value’ which posited that the value of a good was the sum total of the labour required to produce it, so that in order to gain profits the owners of capital must sell the goods at a higher price than their actual values. This generated a relationship of exploitation whereby capitalists reap ‘surplus value’ - that is, the difference between the value actually produced and the value of the labour power that produced it. Marx’s second thesis - the ‘proletarianization thesis’ - was premised on his belief that as the wealth of the bourgeoisie becomes inversely interdependent to that of the proletariat, the class interests of the former are focused upon reducing the wages of the latter. As a direct result, the

working class tend to experience increasing size and poverty, levels of alienation, and political consciousness. These factors would lead towards highly-charged levels of class conflict between the two classes, and in due time, a revolution that would transfer the ownership of the relations of production from the bourgeoisie to the state so that capitalism will become superseded by a socialist-communist epoch.

Marx's thoughts were challenged by Weber (1961 : 181) who saw classes as arising from 'market situations' who argued that it is "the kind of chance in the market is the decisive moment which presents a common condition for the individual's fate". Aware that the market produces highly differentiated levels of life chances, and thus, a proliferation of many classes, Weber differentiated between a 'class situation' and a 'social class'. Whilst the former referred to the possibility of obtaining wealth via the "relative control of goods and skills and from their income-producing use", the latter denoted "the totality of those class situations in which individual and inter-generational mobility is easy and typical" (1968 : 302). Holding a multidimensional perspective to power where 'status' and 'command', in addition to class, are also central mechanisms for its distribution Weber distinguished four classes during his time : classes privileged through property and education, the propertyless intelligentsia and specialists, the petty bourgeoisie, and the working class. Weber (1961 : 194) located problems with Marx's assumption that workers will develop a similar political consciousness as he believed that "parties may represent interests determined through [either] 'class situation' or 'status situation'". Moreover, he rejected Marx's 'structure-consciousness-action' chain of command on the basis that "the direction of interests may vary according whether or not a communal action of a larger or smaller portion of those commonly affected by the 'class situation', or even an association among them" (1961 : 183). Therefore, Weberian sociology abandons Marx's distinction between capital and labour as the key defining elements of class relations in favour of the idea that differentiation amongst workers has the potential to preclude them from forming into a political class.

Marx's and Weber's contributions to class research include both strengths and weaknesses. Whilst Marx's model includes a strong foundational basis for class research, especially his treatment of class as a

'historical-relational' entity, Weber's approach helps to illuminate those areas left obscured by Marx's economical-determinism. Although Weber was at fault for taking the market as given and overlooking the struggles that led to the current economic system, his views on the way that 'workers' may hold class advantages on the basis of their specialist knowledge and skills clarifies why in modern times 'class action' and 'class formation' failed to take the Marxist path. Another key contribution of Weber is his idea that although economic class factors are analytically separable from 'status' factors, empirically it is especially difficult to draw a clear distinction between them. At this point, it is tempting to argue that a promising future for class research is guaranteed by merging Marx's and Weber's perspectives as their strengths seem to bolster each other's limitations. Yet, this assumption is inadequate by the fact that there is more common ground than otherwise between their works. Both saw property and lack of property as the basic categories of class distinctions, and perceived classes as objectively defined places made up of collectively organised social actors. Moreover, despite Weber's emphasis on subjectivity like Marx he still saw individuals' class situation as the most important determinant of their behaviour. Since both legacies ultimately treat classes as historically preconstituted in the social structure on the basis of either purely economic criteria or market relations, and as argued in ensuing sections, a combining approach is unable to capture the full complexities of class relations in advanced industrial societies.

Seeking to address such problems, sociologists injected a cultural 'twist' in the sociology of class, whereby culture was defined as the struggle between dominant and subordinate groups over the construction and meaning of social experience. Accordingly, class has been reconceptualised not "as a 'structure', nor even as a 'category', but as something as which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships" (Thompson, 1963 : 9). Whilst Gramsci (1971) argued that the failure of the proletariat in engendering an anti-capitalist revolution was due to the successful capture of the workers' ideology, self-understanding, and organizations by hegemonic culture, Williams (1977) rejected Marxism's economic and reductionist emphasis in favour of a cultural perspective that connected the realm of art and ideas to the entire material social process. Cultural traditions always encode systems of

dominance and inequality that are reproduced through active human endeavour, and which can run counter to naked economic interests. Other cultural theorists, such as Douglas and Isherwood (1979 : 126-7), saw class groups as spheres of exchange in which people who share certain social and material conditions attempt to synchronise their cultural domains of value, arguing that classes can be understood as sets of cultural processes rather than predetermined outcomes. On similar lines, Bourdieu (1985 : 198) reformulated the concept of class in terms of power and privilege that is both structured and actively lived through aesthetic preferences, consumer behaviour and lifestyles. Treating classes as taxonomies of different cultural dispositions, Bourdieu perceived class agents as occupying positions in various fields of taste with dispositions that influence them to make lifestyle choices characteristic of their class position.

As can be seen from this section, the history of class is closely intertwined with the notions of economy, status, and culture. Yet, its study is not typified by a collective effort, and the right definition and operationalisation of class still comprises an intense debate. Three strands are noteworthy in contemporary times. The mainstream path is headed by the neo-Marxist and neo-Weberian camps who, albeit disagreeing on certain issues, continue to defend the traditional association between class and the economy without making any concessions to intellectual trends that seek to incorporate 'status' and 'culture' in class research programmes. For instance, Goldthorpe (and Marshall, 1992), the leading exponent of neo-Weberian class research, argued strongly that the debate surrounding economic realities in class research is to supersede all the other concerns reflecting the increasing fragmentation and fluidity of late modern societies. A second position is adopted by class sceptics who stipulate that industrial societies have witnessed the demise of 'modern' structures of explanation, so that 'class' is now an obsolete concept to understand everyday lives. This position is even supported by world renowned sociologist, Anthony Giddens (1991), who held that 'class politics' do not hold authority today since the terrain of politics is not oriented to 'brute' social inequalities. A third approach is taken by 'culturalist' sociologists who argue that although people refuse to place themselves 'within' classes, this does not mean that class is no longer significant, and press that nowadays class is implicit in a web of cultural

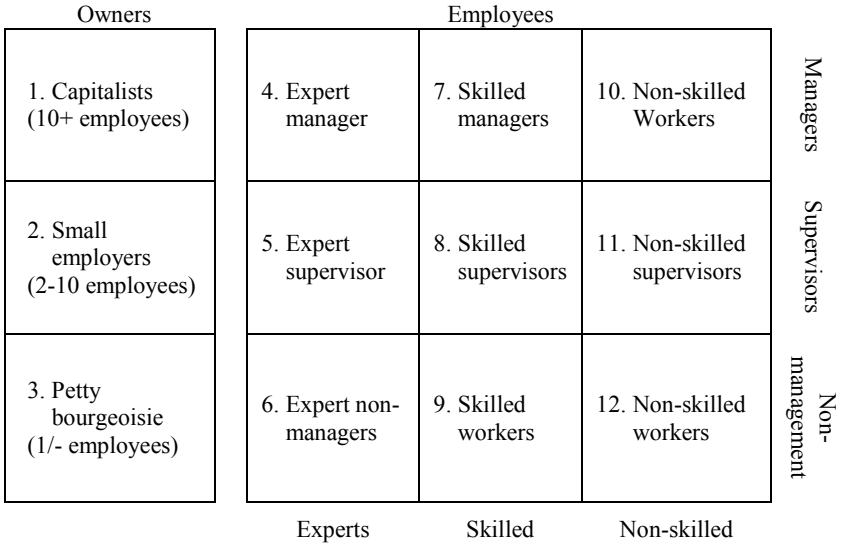
and material relations rather than in terms of overt values or explicit self-identifications. Each of the next parts of this chapter reviews the contributions of each strand with the ultimate objective to delineate a suitable research programme for the study of class relations in contemporary industrial societies.

**The limits of 'mainstream' class research**

The recent history of the sociology of class is chiefly characterised by attempts to update Marx's and Weber's class frameworks. despite that notable thinkers concluded that the driving force underlying class dynamics does not lie solely with economic relationships. Whilst key proponents of critical theory such as Marcuse (1964) and Habermas (1962) searched for other oppressive and progressive forces outside the capital-labour relationship, others such as Laclau and Mouffe (1985) argued that meanings in post-industrial societies are produced by the play of difference in discursive formations. Yet, such developments had little effect on the field of class research. Indeed, the sociology of class continues to be dominated by neo-Marxist and neo-Weberian views, led by Erik O. Wright and John Goldthorpe respectively.

Following initial difficulties in defining exploitation which remains loyal to both Marx's tenets and contemporary social formations, Wright's (1985) second major class scheme drew on 'analytical' Marxism to set up a 'micro-foundational' standpoint where exploitation incorporated traits such as 'labour power', 'physical means of production', 'organizational assets', and 'skills'. Wright located three classes of owners of capital : bourgeoisie (10+ employees), small employers (2-10 employees), and petty bourgeoisie (1/- employees), whilst ranking the remaining classes according to organisational and skill/credential assets. This created a three-fold typology for each dimension - manager/ supervisor/non-manager on one hand and expert/ marginal skills/non-skilled on the other (respectively). Consequently, Wright built a twelve-fold class schema that sought to separate the bourgeoisie from the proletariat so that the more one moves away from the bottom right-hand corner the more the overall level of exploitation increases.

**Figure 1 : Wright's second class scheme**




Source : E.O. Wright (1997) *Class Counts*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press

The value of Wright's work lies in bringing Marxist class theory in line with the global transformations in occupational change. The empirical model also held strong reliability values as he was highly meticulous in his methodological choices. Yet, it also includes a number of problems. For instance, his class scheme scores poorly on validity levels : do employers of 10 or more really represent the most powerful class? is not the power of owners with just one or no employees somehow overstated? does his neglect of occupational titles make sense as this puts employees with qualifications and supervision responsibilities in the working class? Moreover, his position tends to abandon Marx's premises whilst moving towards the Weberian agenda as he asserted that assets pertaining to 'organisation' are central to the rise of the 'new' middle class, but then, included no clear account of 'how' and 'why' this is so. In fact, Goldthorpe (and Marshall, 1992 : 382) insisted strongly that it is analysis, rather than theory, that should be the hallmark of class research : "class

research does not entail a commitment to any particular theory of class but, rather, to a research programme…formulated and then assessed in terms of their heuristic and explanatory performance". Goldthorpe conceived the class structure as built around differences in employment relationships and two structural components. Acknowledging that property has transformed into corporate or state-owned forms so that the largest employers are organisations, Goldthorpe singled the 'service' class (rather than a class of employers) as the highest ladder in the class structure. Moreover, in recognising the expansion of the number of employees and the differentiation of their relationship to their employers, he made a distinction between wage employment through a labour contract from service employment premised on trust. Such assumptions led Goldthorpe (1987) to present an eleven-class model. This scheme is very straightforward next to Wright's and held a number of distinct strengths. These included (i) a clear understanding between occupations and their respective class positions, (ii) a resolution as to whether occupations should be classified according to their work or market situations by employing both in a simultaneous manner, (iii) the separation of lower-level white-collar occupations from the middle class proper, and (iv), a clear division between middle and working class positions.

Considering the problems of Marxists to theorise the rising pluralism and division of the occupational structure, it is unsurprising to note a triumphalist tone in Weberian literature. The Weberian model has proved so popular with academics and bureaucrats alike that the official class scheme used by the British government is a modified version of Goldthorpe's schema. Yet, such zeal seems excessive allowing its neglect of the exploration of change in the occupational structure itself, and its deductive and atheoretical bias. Surely, class research must address the question of why classes, defined in the particular way they are, should have some claim to be a basis of power (Breen and Rottman, 1995). Moreover, Goldthorpe's model shares many of Wright's faults. First, both locate the 'class structure' in the employment structure. Although this stance generated notable achievements such as explaining the reproduction of structured occupational inequality from one generation to another, uncovering key data on the permeability of class boundaries, and signifying the impact of state employment of class attitudes, it is also characterised by notable lacunae. The occupational structure does not

give any direct indication of the wealth or property holdings owned by the most powerful classes, and overlooks how many adults such students, retired and many married women are not in paid employment. Moreover, such an approach neglects the role of non-class factors - such as gender, ethnicity and race - in structuring class unities and divisions, so that it is inept at measuring class in a theoretically sophisticated way. Although employment in advanced modern societies is an invaluable proxy for class position, it remains that groups of jobs and/or occupations are not 'classes' in a sociological sense.

Secondly, both camps adopted the technique of the large-scale sample survey. Although quantification has a vital role in class research as there is no other compelling way to describe statistically the relative sizes of human flows between social classes and strata, it is wrong to regard the survey as the solely appropriate scientific approach to the analysis of class relations. Since quantitative sociology is dominated by the language of variables and gives no space to matters that cannot be described in this language, it is unsuitable for grasping the dynamic processes of class formation, class consciousness, and class struggle (Bertaux and Thompson, 1997). Quoting Crompton (1998 : 122), the "dynamics of the processes and organizations which shape [class relations] can only be explored using a methodology which views the social unit (the neighbourhood, the trade union, the workgroup, the political party) as a whole". To augment its validity levels, class analysis must link the structuralist position with a processual stance since it is only the latter that stresses how class is an embodiment of the past in the present. This view has its foundations in E.P. Thompson's (1963) classic study of the English working-class which sensitises us to the fact that class lies in neither structure nor in agency alone but in their historical relationship. Whilst boundary-work is basic to class research, classes must not be treated as self-subsistent entities which come 'preformed,' and only then enter into dynamic flows. It is necessary for class research to supplement the necessary work of statistical demonstration of class persistence with qualitative work which will help us understand why class persists, how class constrains people and how, at least on occasions, class disadvantage is overcome and mobility is achieved.

Finally, Wright's and Goldthorpe's approaches fail to deal effectively with the 'women question' since both argued that women not in paid employment may be assigned a 'derived' class situation whereby they take the class position of the male 'breadwinner'. Goldthorpe (1983) supported the view that classes comprise households centred on a male 'head' whose formal employment is the valid indicator of the class location of all household members. Wright (2001) recently suggested a conceptual 'menu' to study such linkages - namely, that (i) gender may be a form of class relations, (ii) gender and class relations may have reciprocal causal effects, (iii) gender may be a sorting mechanism into class positions, and (iv), that gender and class may have interactive effects. Both positions, thus, fail to capture the patriarchal relations between husbands and wives, nor how jobs are, in fact, deeply gendered. As Crompton (2001 : 42) argued, "the separation of 'class' and 'gender' means that the genesis and development of the employment structure itself (which is being used as a proxy for class) is not addressed directly". Various ethnographies and case studies of class formation, and of class consciousness and action, have shown clearly that class and gender processes are complexly interrelated, rather than separate phenomena (Zmroczek and Mahony, 1999; Walkerdine et al., 2001). This does not mean that the field should not explore the significance of the employment /gender boundary, but only that a focus should be retained upon the effects of the gender and class/employment interaction rather than going at length to keep them separate. Since gender is a central element in the structuring of life chances, the impact of class factors cannot be isolated from gender.

This section shows that class research has much to gain from building upon and going beyond the neo-Marxist and neo-Weberian positions. Yet, some sociologists think that this is a waste of energy since current industrial societies are devoid of class structures. 'Class', according to class sceptics, is an obsolete concept to grasp contemporary industrial societies, and thus, urge insistently class analysts to give up the 'ghost'. This issue is the subject of the coming section.

**Myths of 'death-of-class' analysis**

The coming of a 'late' phase of modernity was characterised by swift and crucial socio-economic transformations. These included the restructuring of the western economies away from the manual sectors towards the service sector, to the expansion of women in the labour market (especially part-time) and the rise of consumption as an arena in which people's desires and hopes are fulfilled. Supporters of the anti-class brigade argue that such social change resulted in a radical transformation of societal dynamics so that 'class' is now an obsolete tool for social analysis : "it is a capitalism without classes, but individualised social inequality and all the related social and political problems" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002 : 205).

Literature generally cites Nisbet's (1959 : 11) claim that "class…is nearly valueless for the clarification of the data of wealth, power and social status…as a sociological concept, class is dead" as the first claim in anti-class analysis. Yet, it is noteworthy that whilst at the end of the nineteenth century Bernstein attempted to persuade the Marxist Democratic Party to debate the significant improvement of the wages of the working class and the significant increase of the middle class, the inter-war years were also characterised by calls to take note of how the classic employer-employee relationship was being displaced by the increasing control of managers (Lee and Turner, 1996). Marshall's (1963) claim during the post-war years that welfare-capitalism generated a 'hyphenated society' - meaning that the welfare and the market were ultimately incompatible characteristics - was also influential in generating the belief that citizenship and welfare reduced the salience of class divisions even to the extent of eroding class differences. More recently, scholars argued that in a post-industrial era it is theoretical knowledge, rather than class, which constitutes the axial principle of differentiation, inequality and group formation. Particularly associated with the writings of Bell (1976), post-modernists emphasised the historical shift in the basis of social dynamics, from property to technical skills, so that education and political mobilisation come perceived as replacing inheritance and patronage as the principle mechanisms and routes of access. On similar lines, other social scientists such as Clark and Lipset (1991) argued that stratification is becoming increasingly pluralistic, multidimensional, and shaped by

factors located outside the workplace. This led to a declining importance of class cleavages, especially ideological ones between the left and right, and a growing salience of a politics that embraces non-class divisions and issues.

Postmodernists claimed that the 'grand narrative' of class is no longer useful to comprehend either social reality or change (Lyotard, 1984; Bauman, 1992). This standpoint perceives society as extraordinary complex and chronically fragmented along a variety of dimensions including age, gender, ethnicity and culture, so that classes no longer hold any privileging role in the social sciences. Reflexive modernists also support the anti-class brigade by arguing that 'class politics' do not hold authority in eras where the terrain of politics is not oriented to 'brute' social inequalities. Giddens (1991 : 214) viewed industrial societies as typified by "politics of self-actualisation in a reflexively ordered environment, where that reflexivity links self and body to systems of global scope". Beck's picture of industrial societies is one characterised by a complex relationship between 'individualisation' and 'risk'. On one hand, increasing reflexivity functions to disembed individuals from "historically prescribed social forms and commitments" (1992 : 128), including those related to class, so that individuals have to produce and stage their own biographies themselves. On the other hand, class conflict has been replaced by anxieties over new global risks - such as hurricanes and food contamination - which, Beck stresses, do not follow the logic of classes as even the most powerful are in jeopardy. In sum, 'society can no longer look in the mirror and see social classes….all we have left are the individualized fragments' (Beck and Willms 2004 : 107). Consumption is also perceived as taking over from class as the key to understand the contours of current social divisions. Pakulski and Waters (1996a : 122) highlighted how nowadays consumption is the key form of self-expression and source of identity : "'Taste', 'fashion', and lifestyle'…are the key sources of social differentiation that displace both class and political affiliation". Within this liberal framework, the key cleavage in contemporary society is between different sets of consumers with interests and political alliances centring on this aspect of social position.

A critical evaluation of the anti-class standpoint must acknowledge that sociologists have truly claimed too much explanatory mileage for class,

the ‘structure-consciousness-action’ chain is indeed weak, and recent years have been characterised by the decline of traditional class politics. Late modernity is also marked by unprecedented levels of individualism which has resulted in the weakening of collective class movements. Indeed, class research programmes focusing solely on ‘modernist’ assumptions of class - such as class consciousness and struggle - come across as weak and unconvincing. Whilst such affirmations make a ‘blanket defence of class theory’ unconvincing, this is not the same as saying that the arguments and conclusions presented by class sceptics are to be embraced uncritically. Knowledge experts remain ‘enslaved’ to the power held by multi-national companies, and top research universities not only forge partnerships with leading industrial corporations but also structure their own governance in the template of corporate hierarchy. Moreover, postmodern rationales never engage with studies signifying the persistence of class relations, with their arguments coming across as high-flown rhetoric posing as liberalism in new guises. Industrial societies are still capitalist in character, and while many changes are occurring, they are insufficient to justify the demise of class hierarchies in favour of cultural diversity and social pluralism. One also finds evidence demonstrating a strong relationship between class voting and traditional political values, and how economic growth raises rather than undermines class inequality (Evans, 1999).

Giddens’ and Beck’s views that ‘individualisation’ and ‘risk’ run counter to the notion of ‘class cultures’ is also disputable. A case in point is the middle class, which in recent decades, has surpassed the working class as the archetypical basis of class research. The middle class, however, is not premised on the concept of ‘collectivity’ but rather on contingent forms of individualised identities which operate relationally. The coming of individualised cultures have not brought the end of class relations but the reworking of “class as implicit, as encoded in people’s sense of self-worth and in their attitudes to and awareness of others - in how they carry themselves as individuals” (Savage, 2000 : 107). Moreover, there can be no doubt as to the prosperous resources owned by the most powerful that help them decrease their risk of encountering potential jeopardies, as well as circumvent those obstacles when ultimately affected. With respect to consumption, spending patterns are not only utilised by individuals to differentiate themselves from others but also as key sym-

bolic strategies in the class struggle. For example, subcultural styles amongst young adults are not simply about cultural tastes but also about class identity, social position, and power (Bettie, 2003). Similarly, not working hard in places of work may not be always due to personal laziness but as a form of class resistance (Charlesworth, 2000). Finally, it is noteworthy that the accusation levelled towards class researchers for "manufactur[ing] class where it no longer exists" (Pakulski and Waters, 1996b : 667) is also unfounded since ethnographic and qualitative studies, as well as reflexive and cultural projects, provide rich evidence in favour of the continued salience of class (Ortner, 2003). Such studies show how class locations affect not only individuals' wealth but their access to things, relationships, and practices - as well as their self-esteem, self-worth, and respect by others - and hence, their chances of living a fulfilling life.

There can be no doubt that class structures have undergone important changes in recent decades so that 'class' is no longer 'the way we know it'. As the old division of labour was swept away, this was accompanied by an increase of individuals situated, or perceiving themselves to be located, in the middle class. In many ways, such a transformation brought on a new class paradigm where the past foundations of class formation, consciousness, and struggle became displaced upon a novel dimension that recognises the mutual constitution of markets, individuals, and classes. However, funeral arrangements for the 'death' of class were untimely and we should beware of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. In a society dominated by middle-class discourse, members "no longer spontaneously and unambiguously use the language of class as obvious… whilst class is not dead, the monolithic social imaginary of class has, indeed, had its day" (Scott, 2000 : 53). This emerged clearly in Walkerdine's (et al., 2001 : 212) study with young women where it was concluded that class "operates in and through subjects : "it is marked on bodies and minds, it ruptures the smooth surface of the discourses of classlessness, it can be 'spotted a mile off' in the way that inscribes subjects". Indeed, class struggle has become far removed from the occupational world : "the fragility and vulnerability of the new middle-class self has to be continually authorized and asserted, continually struggling to be taken seriously, and seen as worthy of moral authority…This is where the class struggle is being fought" (Skeggs, 2004 : 154). It therefore fol-

lows that nineteenth-century models of class are no longer adequate. Class structures are more complex than neo-Marxist and neo-Weberian models assert, both of which ultimately assign class structure a casual role in the evolution of societies and less subject to the claming effects of affluence that modernisation theories posit. If the sociology of class is to be preserved, the class concept has to be radically separated from the Marxian economics and Weberian non-historicity, whilst also losing its privileged status as the key sociological context. There is, indeed, a future for class analysis, but only if we steer through many of the debates that have plagued stratification studies over the last decade or so, and found the field upon a clear theoretical framework. This is, of course, a foremost challenge for sociology, a test that is taken up in the coming section.

**Rethinking Class**

One must concur with Bradley (1996) when, alluding to the sociology of class, stated that although the Empress is not naked, her attire is scanty and stands in desperate need of new clothes. Class research demands a research programme that captures how class includes external constraint *and* individual agency, as well as economic *and* social elements.

Bradley is not alone in advocating such reforms. Others stressed for "the need to reconsider the relationship between economic inequalities…and specifically cultural differences springing from consumption and lifestyles" (Devine and Savage, 2000 : 184). Skeggs (2004) called for an insight of class relations that goes beyond the 'economic', by incorporating the effects of culture, and how this is central to the making of class difference, generating new ways of attributing value, and producing new forms of exploitation. The work of Pierre Bourdieu has served as a key theoretical source for this camp of research, with Savage (2000 : xv) going as far as to affirm that "the work of Bourdieu offers currently the most developed theoretical formulation of this kind of argument". Bourdieu's work on class is largely hinged on his concepts of habitus and capital. The former refers to a set of dispositions acquired through early socialisation that are, in turn, responsible for an individual's behaviour and the typical way he/she acts or interprets social reality. This concept is so central to Bourdieu's (1985 : 198) thinking that classes are ac-

tually conceptualised as groups of people sharing a class-specific habitus : "classes [are] sets of agents who occupy similar positions and who, being placed in similar conditions and subjected to similar conditionings, have every likelihood of having similar dispositions and interests and therefore of producing similar practices and adopting similar stances". Capital is defined by Bourdieu (1986 : 241-2) as "accumulated labour (in its materialised form or its 'incorporated', embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e. exclusive basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labour". Three types of capital are generally highlighted : economic, cultural and social. Whilst economic capital refers to monetary income as well as other financial resources and assets directly convertible into money, cultural capital can exist in

> …the *embodied* state, in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the *objectified* state, in the form of cultural goods…in the *institutionalised* state, a form of objectification which must be set apart because, as will be seen in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee.
>
> Bourdieu, 1986 : 249-50 - italics added

Social capital refers to the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition. Yet, class position is not the result of simple addition of class capital but follows two key dimensions. Whilst differences in the volume of capital demarcate persons from one class to another, differences in the composition holdings are responsible for putting actors in different intra-class factions. Bourdieu highlighted another form of capital : symbolic capital. This is not a fourth type of capital and is inherently different from the rest in that it is a form of power not perceived 'as such', but arising as a legitimate demand for recognition, deference, and obedience. Symbolic capital was defined as "a transformed and thereby disguised form of physical 'economic' capital, [which] produces its proper effect inasmuch as it conceals the fact that it originates in 'material' forms of capital

which are also, in the last analysis, the source of its effects" (Bourdieu, 1977 : 183). Symbolic capital refers to prestige and reputation, as a result of which, arbitrarily forms of capital become recognized as legitimate.

Bourdieu also clarified how class struggle occurs through competition over valued forms of capital and definitions of what is legitimate capital rather than movement in the labour market. Bourdieu highlighted the 'trickle-down effect' whereby a perpetual competition exists over the appropriation of the most "distinguished" objects or practices. Initially seized upon by those with the greatest economic and/or cultural capital - that is, by the dominant class - such objects or practices diffuse downward through social space over time. Precisely to the extent that they become progressively 'popularized', each earlier group of devotees tends to abandon them in favour of new objects and practices that will enable them to re-assert the exclusivity of their preferences. To this effect, Bourdieu (1984, : 214) claimed that lifestyles are not "different…from classes, but are rather dominant classes denied as such, or, so to speak, sublimated and thereby legitimated". However, class distinctions from 'trickle-down' effects lack durability on their own since they are not institutionally secured, and thus, subject to non-stop re-creation. Symbolic violence achieves 'permanency' only if class distinctions are subject to 'codification' - that is, the 'formalization' of arbitrary acts of distinction "by establishing…the explicit consensus of the whole group" (Bourdieu, 1991 : 236).

The 'women' debate in class research also experiences a breakthrough through Bourdieu's sociology. Bourdieu calls for researchers to conceptualise gender as an integrative part of all social relations - including class relations - rather than as a specific and autonomous category. This way it becomes possible to see that "sexual properties are inseparable from class properties as the yellowness of lemon is from acidity : a class is defined in an essential respect by the place and value it gives to the two sexes and to their socially constituted dispositions" (Bourdieu, 1984 : 107-8). Indeed, many feminists 'appropriate' Bourdieu's sociology to explain the subordinate position of women in current industrial societies, and how men are more successful in using their gender dispositions to strengthen their volumes and levels of capital (Adkins and Skeggs, 2004). The argument is that gender cuts across all forms of capital to

form a ‘gendered habitus’ which then structures women’s and men’s decisions, behaviours, and opportunities. Gender in this way is posited as an ‘asymmetrical category’ with society favouring the masculine over the feminine habitus so that women find themselves in economically vulnerable and powerless positions.

Equipped with such analytical basics, academics conducted vigorous empirical research on contemporary class relations. Three results are especially noteworthy. Primarily, studies distanced themselves from modernist studies of class which located class position and identity within the ‘occupational’ realms to deem such issues as inextricably linked with particular class cultures. The working class are generally depicted as inhabiting a culture of poverty and alienation, as their lives are absorbed in the effort involved in coping and getting by and in the stress of dealing with an unfulfilling world (Munt, 2000). Charlesworth’s (2000) working-class emerges as inhabitants come to be aware, through their own experiences, of the fundamental ramifications of their social conditions imbued in their everyday life which they have to deal with, and respond to, through those very structuring conditions. However, other studies point out that the presence of a moderate income amongst particular sectors of the working-class population has gendered a fracturing process, whereby such people become remarkably resourceful in ‘getting-by’, drawing on resources of manual skills, hard work, and the support of neighbours (Savage et al., 2001). The middle class is represented as holding a relationship of instability and vulnerability vis-à-vis the capitalist market. Its internal sociocultural dynamic of competing lifestyles and consumer practice on one hand, and the ways in which these lifestyles naturalise economic privilege through a discourse of honour and morality on the other, constitute the generative dynamics of middle-class cultural practice.

Secondly, findings demonstrated that class no longer arises as a ‘self-conscious principle of social identity’. The debate as whether the working class would play a historical role by becoming a ‘class-for-itself’ has been superseded by one focusing on whether there is any coherent class consciousness amongst the population. This is because subjects were generally unwilling to claim class identities, whilst adopting ‘defensive’, ‘hesitant’, ‘ambivalent’, or ‘ambiguous’ attitudes towards class labels.

Although people accepted the presence of economic inequalities, and were even ready to discuss class as a political issue, they tend to refuse to place themselves in a particular stratum. This is not taken as meaning that class is absent in late modernity. On the contrary, researchers argued that it is precisely because class remains so powerful that people find it difficult to articulate their class position. In late modernity, class remains an embarrassing and unsettling subject, that affects our relationships, experiences, and practices which we have reason to value : "the arbitrariness and injustice of natal class…can prompt guilt, shame, resentment and defensiveness, and the balance of these feelings and the ways of handling them are likely to vary according to class position" (Sayer, 2005 : 201-2). Skeggs (1997) presented an impressive account of such notions in her research on young working class women. Her research showed how these women found it difficult to 'face up' to class, whilst distinguishing their class locations through moral boundaries. They claimed virtues for themselves and imputed vices to others, and drew on simple stereotyping to explain the behaviour and characteristics of subjects in other classes. Such data backs Savage's (2000) claim that although nowadays class rarely 'unites' people into a proud collectivity, class continues to retain a key role in the link between individuals' inner emotional words and external social/structural processes.

Finally, studies found that class practice is carried out less through antagonistic and collective forms of advocacy, and more through personalised and individualised strategies. Subjects are nowadays increasingly reluctant to take part in organised demonstrations and protests as a significant sector of working class individuals also became cynical of labour movements (Lamont, 1992). Families are more inclined to improve their position in the class hierarchy by either translocating to influential residential areas, furthering one's educational credentials, and through lifestyle strategies. Social closure - that is, the erection of defensive barriers by individuals in more dominant class positions (exclusion), as well as to the efforts of subordinates to usurp the privileges of those above them by imitating their lifestyle (usurpation) - has become a dominant strategy of class action in late modernity. It is not simply that preferred drinks move from ordinary red wine to cocktails as one ascends from a lower to a higher class faction, but rather that each higher class faction has a whole combination of specific class practices. Class action in late

modernity takes increasingly the form of distinction where cultural objects, with their subtle hierarchy, are predisposed to mark the stages and degrees of the initiatory progress which defines the enterprise of class struggle. Nowadays there is a clear homology between the fields of class power and consumption which leads to an objective orchestration of the two. Similar divisions are at work with the fields of consumption and social class, even if they are not directly connected. The class struggle is being waged on a daily basis through culture as a form of symbolic violence, through relationships of entitlement that are legitimised and institutionalised.

There is no doubt that the tenets on which culturalist class research is founded hold great potential for class research. Apart from delineating how lives outside the workplace are of key importance in the reproduction of class inequalities, it also demonstrates how the weakening of the collective aspects of class formation does not imply the 'death' of class. Empirical research showed clearly there requires a combination of cultural *and* economic analyses to grasp the totality of social class. As Crompton and Scott (2005 : 192) put it, "it is a matter of both/and, not of either/or". The latter is possible through a 'dual systems' approach that draws a distinction between, on one hand, the 'objective' outcomes of class processes, such as material differences in income/wealth and the social relations associated with these, and, on the other hand, the subjective and culturally mediated experience of class relations. Now that a research programme that is capable to deal with current class dynamics has been outlined, the next chapter focuses on the special fine-tuning that such an agenda must go through when investigating a research population in the latter stages of the life course.

# 3

# RESEARCHING CLASS IN LATER LIFE

## Conceptual paths

One finds persistent efforts from gerontologists to conceptualise the concept of 'class'. Though Matcha (1997 : 11) claimed that in "relation to the sociology of aging, class refers to the economic position of those defined as old", there is substantial disaccord amongst social gerontologists on the right definition and operationalisation of class.

A traditional strategy to conceptualise class was in terms of 'prestige or rank', as a hierarchical position in the social order based upon the disparity in status and prestige. This conceptual path reflected the American tradition where by class is meant two or more orders of people who are believed to be, and are accordingly ranked by the members of the community in socially superior and inferior positions. For instance, both Jacobs (1974) and Streib (1985) stressed how class refers to roles of intimate association with others - that is, strata of society composed of individuals who accept each other as equals and who thus qualify for intimate association. According to this standpoint, although families may change their occupational class by changing jobs, they can only improve their class position if they are admitted to intimacy relationships by those who possess the criteria for higher rank. A key strength of this approach is in demonstrating how older persons are positioned in dominant or subjugated classes as a result of complex cultural and social relations. It is through the investigation of status differentiation that one can truly arrive at a holistic understanding of class structuring and action. However, its overemphasis on prestige meant that it underplays the impact of statutory policies and exploitative relationships on material inequality. Studies which treat class relations as status-related phenomena remain oblivious to the way in which the interplay of productive and political relations determines, both in principle and in practice, economic forms of inequalities. Following Marshall and Tindale (1977-8), it also results that

such studies put undue stress on the positive functions of class in ordering society. Hence, coming across as devoid of a transformative edge as if they seemed to find nothing more interesting to do than try to explain how happy older people are.

A major twist in the conceptualisation of class occurred at the turn of the 1980s. As age-related government policy became more 'commodified' and 'privatised', gerontologists turned towards Marxist theory to conceptualise class relations. Social class constituted a key concept in the emergence of the political economy of ageing approach, with researchers emphasising the relations of production in their conceptualisation of class, and more specifically, the relations between those who owned the means of production and those who did not. Guillemard (1981 : 288) made it clear that "classes [in later life] are defined not only by their place in the process of production, and by their position within the technical division of labor, but also by their position within political and ideological structures". She consequently concluded that "the traditional Marxist definition, which analyzes the class structure of the capitalist mode of production by basically contrasting the two antagonistic classes - capitalist and proletarian - must be upheld" (ibid.). Studies of class relations conducted through this position were instrumental in rebutting the naive assumption which posits that older persons' exclusion from the labour market functioned to decrease class differences. It put to light the fact that the majority of working-class retirees will register a degree of distress that warrants social work intervention, as they encounter "problems with fuel bills, difficulties with house repairs, or conflict with a landlord; in addition, problems may arise through interaction between the physical and social contexts of ageing" (Phillipson, 1982 : 111). Next to status-oriented approaches, this model was distinctive due to its focus on class conflict and steadfast hold on the lifelong and statutory effects of class exploitation. Yet, it overlooks the effect of post-industrialisation and late modernity on the character of later life, class relations, and society in general. Moreover, the strength of the status perspective on class proves to be its weakness since an economic reductionist view ignores how classes are made and given value through cultural and symbolic processes. The political economy approach to the study of class in later life was founded on the erroneous assumption that older persons occupy a 'pensioner' status defined by a confining dependence on state welfare

when, in fact, a rising number of retirees are taking an active part in the development of new later life identities.

Confronted with such difficulties, others embraced a multi-dimensional perspective to class much inspired by Weber. For instance, Osgood and Mizruchi (1982 : 223) argued that "classes are broad social categories that, at least in part, reflect similarities in styles of life" with "lifestyles associated with people in the same class category including, among other things, particular orientations to manners, speech, clothing styles, education". More recently, Estes' (1999 : 23) argued that one useful concept of class is "a common relation to the economic foundations of society…characterised by a coherent social and cultural existence [where] members of a class share a common lifestyle, educational background, kinship networks, consumption patterns, work habits, and beliefs". A Weberian definition seems analytically appropriate for older people because it does not necessarily reflect productive relations, and can capture the complex character of class relations in later life. It even corrects some of the economic reductionism present in the political economy of ageing by confirming that production and property relations are by no means sole determinants of class. Moreover, there is a strong tendency for people with similar styles of life to participate together in both formal and informal groups, and to choose activities that reflect their similar value orientations. Problems arise, however, when one notes it overlooks the role of class struggles in the creation of coherent social and cultural existences. This puts constraints on the quest to understand large-scale processes of class reproduction. Moreover, studies tend to take a narrow approach to 'culture' and neglect how it is related to other spheres such as the body, self, and politics. Although this neo-Weberian approach sensitises the 'class' concept to non-economic realities, one must concur with McMullin's (2000 : 522) view that "it is unlikely that a better understanding of inequality [in later life] will be achieved if the relations of production and distribution are ignored".

These three perspectives offer a rich attempt towards the conceptualisation of class in gerontological lives, and demonstrate that there are good reasons to focus on the social, economic, and cultural aspects of class realities. The problem is that all are quick to adopt an 'add and stir' approach whereby age was 'added on' to other analytic premises. Un-

doubtedly, this fails to provide an age-sensitive analysis of class dynamics in late life. Just as much as 'adding women in' to models based upon men's experiences depicted women as 'other', so too 'adding the old in' to theories based on younger persons' experiences is flawed : "as sociologists studying ageing, we do not view our subjects as simply men and women but as older men and older women. Although this point may be seem obvious and even simplistic, it is not translated into theory and only rarely is it recognised in research" (McMullin, 1995 : 37).

McMullin's insight suggests strongly that the study of gerontological class dynamics must conceptualise older persons as situated upon a unique phase of the life course. This is, of course, less than straightforward than it initially seems. Whether older persons are 'different' from younger peers is a serious bone of contention in social gerontology. The dominant position is that later life arises as a social construction rather than as a universal and natural process. Bytheway (2005), a leading supporter of this position, argued that the logic for creating a category of people and calling it the 'elderly', the 'old' or the 'aged' is fallible since later life exists solely as a cultural concept. The constructionist view experienced robust challenges in recent years. Although recognising the reified status of later life, the reluctance to acknowledge 'old age' as a distinct stage in the life course presents an invalid picture of social systems and relations. Arguing that older persons are not only 'ageing' but also realistically 'older', critics advocated that the presence of an older age is 'real' : "Old people are in fact young people? Really? What happens to all those years they have lived…Years are not empty containers…Why must these years be trivialized?" (Andrews, 1999 : 309)

The pervasineness of ageism provides further backing in favour of the realist approach. Indeed, old age does in fact confer a loss of power, even for those who are advantaged - and thus able to make different 'claims' in later life to power and resources - by gender and class. Discrimination and exclusion based on age - across lines of race, class, and gender - does exist. The point at which one becomes 'old' varies but once reached brings with it a loss of authority and status (Calasanti, 2003). The constructionist stance is also problematic because, whilst the abolition of any 'other' connotations makes sense in campaigning contexts, this is

difficult to adhere to in empirical research since "anything that is studied is forced into existence by the gaze of those who study it" (Wilson, 2001 : 478). It overlooks the biological and existential contingency of the individual life-span when this is of crucial significance for the irreversible progression of older persons' lives. After all, both gerontologists and older persons recognised the existence of 'old' people. One cannot but help noticing that the constructionist view fails to acknowledge that as individuals grow older they tend to experience a shift in meta-perspective - namely, a shift from a material and rational vision to a more cosmic and transcendent one. This process has been termed by Tornstam (2005) as 'gerotranscendence'. A research investigation which touches and reflects upon the effect of gerotranscendence on class relations in later life has yet to be conducted.

In evaluating the realist-constructionist dispute it is evident that both parties have strong and relevant arguments to make. It is possible to bringing this matter to a close by agreeing with Calasanti and Slevin (2001 : 17) who stated that "social constructions of old age have real consequences for those so defined". This implies the necessity for the development of novel concepts to study class dynamics in later life, concepts that are sensitive to the fact that class arises in later life in both constructivist and realist ways.

**Class and economic differentiation**

Class position has far-reaching consequences that penetrate every aspect of older persons' lives. Initially, it was unclear how class groupings were affected by retirement as studies generated conflicting results. Whilst some viewed the onset of early retirement to bring negative consequences to white-collar workers whose commitment to work was based in intrinsic attributes of the job, others found retirement to be more detrimental to the working class as members were less able to carry over their occupational prestige. Yet, recent research found that retirement is most adverse towards the working class. As Phillipson (1993 : 194) concluded, "[retirement] is the final resolution of the advantages and disadvantages attached to a given class…a resolution in the sense that once the advantages arising from a particular position are consolidated they are likely to be sustained even into very old age".

Operationalising 'class' upon the Registrar General's (UK) classification of occupations or upon some general socioeconomic ranking, researchers found a strong positive relationship between class and quality of life. Older persons in middle-class positions owned relatively higher levels of financial capital due to more savings and better occupational pensions (Bardasi and Jenkins, 2002). They lived in better housing and up-market retirement communities, and afforded to take a more active role in various social activities. Middle-class members were also less inclined to be caring for a spouse, living with children or in residential care, and formed part of extensive and stable social networks (Arjouch et al., 2005). Since income and education enjoy a positive relation, they were more successful in resisting age discrimination and accessing free or subsidised welfare services (Hugman, 1996). Working-class peers, on the other hand, entered retirement after careers in temporary and/or low-paying jobs so that they found their pensions to be insufficient to meet all their basic needs. Many have no alternative but to re-enter the workforce (or become financially dependent on their children) to cover house payments and other expenses including prescription medications (Calasanti and Bonanno, 1992). This generated much discontent since, contrary to people in professional occupations who are highly committed to their work and see less distinction between their occupation and other areas of their lives, the working class perceives retirement as a reward following a hard working life. Other conditions associated with the working-class - such as deprived job conditions, unhealthy diets, low physical exercise, and high use of tobacco/alcohol - also engendered higher mortality and disability rates (Oliviere and Monroe, 2004).

With the exception of neighbourhood relations, working-class elders did not usually form part of extensive and stable social networks, being less "involved in sports clubs, which is likely to promote their physical health, and in civic and religious organisations, which may include involvement in activities that are altruistic or benefit the community" (Perren et al., 2003 : 79). They also scored low levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction (McMullin and Cairney, 2004), and changed their housing frequently albeit always remaining close to inner-city areas where prices were lower than average (Matcha, 1997). Working-class elders experienced less-than-average levels of social integration as they were less likely to engage in both formal volunteering and organised leisure, and

generally lacked those resources which facilitate involvement such as income but also access to a vehicle and positive health levels (ibid.). Although Scharf et al's (2004) work on social exclusion experienced by older people in deprived neighbourhoods does not focus upon the working class as such, there is no doubt that this social grouping is well represented within such a localities. Informants living in such areas were found to experience exclusion from basic services because although the overwhelming majority of older people had access to basic utilities such as gas, electricity, water, and telephone, most cut back on using these services in order to make ends meet. Studies also highlighted that older people living in depressed areas could be described as being socially isolated and/or severely lonely, relatively vulnerable to serious crime so that few felt safe when leaving their home after dark, as well as being relatively excluded from involvement in formal social relationships within their communities.

Subaltern sectors within working-class elders - such as women and oldest members - experience even worse conditions. One central theme in this respect constitutes the notion of a 'double jeopardy' which highlights how the combination of classism and sexism, for instance, make working-class older women experience a worse ageing transition than men. Occupational pensions are generally characterised by various 'malestream' predispositions as they were designed with men's patterns of employment in mind, and based on the 'final salary' and years of pensionable service to encourage company loyalty (Ginn and Arber, 1999). Even if covered, women tend to receive poorer return benefits than men due to lower earnings, fewer pensionable rates, and the penalties of a severed occupational career due to family responsibilities. Moreover, because such schemes are provided voluntarily by employers, they are less available to some sectors of employees. This is especially true for workers outside of manufacturing industries who tend not to have been the recipients of unionized collective agreements and amongst which women are usually overrepresented. Age is, undoubtedly, another strong stratifying factor so that the oldest members of the working class fare less well than their peers. This is generally the case because whilst older persons accumulated their private pensions at a time of far lower real wages, the fact that changes to pension systems - such as home responsibility credits for women caring for children - were never applied retro-

spectively means that older women did not benefit from these changes. This relative poverty of older pensioners occurs even despite the fact that for the oldest-old social security benefits increase with age.

A related interest to class differentiation in later life is whether income held by older persons remains the same, increases or even decreases. Research generated three competing scenarios (O'Rand and Henretta, 1999). The 'status-levelling' hypothesis predicted a reduction in inequality amongst individuals. This was argued on the basis that retirement is defined by the change in income source from earnings to annuities from Social Security and accumulated assets which minimises the effects of past earning history. This view did not posit that there will be no relation between early attainments and retirement income, but only that the gap between the haves and the have-not will decline following the employment-retirement transition. The levelling position parallels the description of retirement found in older gerontological theory as a new stage of life with sparse links to earlier years. The 'status-maintenance' view predicted that disparities are equally preserved following retirement. This occurred because resources and rewards obtained early in the life-course have persistent effects over time, and served to maintain their status throughout the ageing experience. The third view was the 'cumulative-advantage' hypothesis. Predicting that the employment-retirement shift to be characterised by rising cohort differentiation, this view dealt with the ways in which initial comparative advantage of trained capacity, structural location and available resources make for successive increments of advantage such that the gaps between the haves and the have-nots widen. A review of the literature finds that all three hypotheses were backed by empirical data. Thus, it is difficult to determine the 'exact' and 'real' character of economic mobility in the later years. A better understanding of such seemingly conflicting data is possible through an in-depth analysis of studies which reported evidence for more than one hypothesis (e.g. Pampel and Hardy, 1994). These demonstrated that although inequality in family income rose in panel data, as the cohort went beyond the employment-retirement transition, most of the increase occurred within status categories (i.e. within levels of education and occupation) and relatively little between socio-economic strata. Whilst it is true that this increase in inequality could have been only due to casual, unforeseen events, or the result of individuals' roles in the public sphere,

from the data it was equally obvious that subjects rarely, if ever, ended up in financial situations held by groups in diverse socio-economic strata. Hence, it is logical to presume that the mobility experienced was of a 'relative' rather than an 'absolute' character. In other words, although the level of inequality did decrease between individuals in diverse classes, inequality levels experienced by subjects within particular classes were most significant.

Studies on class and economic differentiation have generated valid and enlightening information regarding gerontological class dynamics. Yet, they also included a number of shortcomings on which future studies should improve upon. Similar to the wider field of gerontology, theory-building has been a marginal feature in aforementioned studies. Researchers were quick to provide facts and figures, but then failed to integrate them within an explanatory framework. This lacuna is serious since theory improves our understanding of later life, integrates findings into holistic totalities, and explains how and why observed phenomena are related (Bengston et al., 2005). On a methodological plane, studies adopted a positivist standpoint that reduced external reality to observable patterns, and thus, ignoring how class in later life is also shaped by biographical and subjective contexts. Moreover, the situation is more complex than the mobility hypotheses suggest. Income levels in later life may not experience a sudden change at retirement but adopt 'blib' or 'zigzag' trails. These limitations insinuate strongly that the study of what older people themselves make of who and what they are, as well as how they view their worlds must be central to gerontological class research : "class refers to much more than the individual's economic and social position…it focuses on intraindividual linkages across time as a central mechanism producing a type of continuity…between work and retirement phases" (O'Rand and Henretta, 1999 : 35). Just as much as the coming of late modernity resulted in the emergence of processual and individuated forms of class relations, it is logical to argue that the coming of third age plunged the location of gerontological class relations into the 'unofficial' realm of everyday life. Dowd (1980), therefore, was correct in defining the notion of class in later life upon individuals' possession of 'personal' and 'social' resources *together* with those of an economic nature. In fact, ethnographies on third age clubs showed clearly how older persons drew upon personal, material and cultural resources to

maintain and improve their positions in the hierarchical space (Okely, 1990).

This section affirms that gerontological class research would benefit immensely from a programme of study that is able to comprehend that whilst later life represents a break from midlife due to the effects of public transfer programmes and novel leisure interests, there are important links between past and present lives in the live of individuals that shape the nature of ageing. This is a challenge discussed further in the final section of this chapter.

**Operationalising class in later life**

A popular strategy amongst sociologists and gerontologists alike is to locate the class position of older persons through the 'derivative' rationale. The latter can be traced to Wright's (1978 : 93) argument that the best way to deal with class locations is by treating them as "parts of class-trajectories". In this manner, class positions become understood as a life-time structure of positions through which an individual passes in the course of a work career. Retirees, therefore, "occupy post-class locations…[in that] their class can only be understood in terms of the trajectories of class positions to which they are linked" (ibid.). This standpoint locates older persons' class position according to their final occupation, and in the case where subjects such as married older women held no employment history, their class locations was deemed to be equivalent to the final occupation of the household 'breadwinner'. The 'derivative' approach was criticised by sociologists for yielding a restrictive and distorted view of the class structure. Social gerontologists also disapproved, with Kohli (1988 : 370) voicing concern that class researchers followed classical sociology by treating social orders as 'work societies' where non-workers are regarded as "not fully qualified" persons. Others denounced it by claiming that its

> …underlying assumption appears to be that only those with a current or recent occupation have class interests or are capable of class action. This perpetuates the belief

> that there are no class-based differences in resources, behaviour and attitudes among elderly people.
>
> Arber and Ginn, 1991 : 21

Although these criticisms are highly valid in their goal they are nonetheless imprecise in two major ways. Primarily, class research does not suppose that only employed persons have class interests or are capable of class action. For instance, Wright's (1997) *Class Counts* dedicated as much as four chapters on the class location of housewives not in paid employment. Moreover, non-employed groupings - ranging from students to prison inmates to immigrants – are figuring more prominently in class research. This means that whilst class research is ready to accept that even non-employed individuals hold a prominent role in the class system, an exception is made to older persons. Secondly, the derivative approach does actually admit the presence of class relations in later life by positing that class-based behaviour amongst retirees reflects patterns found within the present working community. In this way, the class interests of older persons previously in working-class occupations are contingent upon those interests beheld by the present working class community, and similarly with respect to individuals in middle and upper class positions. The legitimacy of this rationale was defended by Marshall (1997) who carried out a survey exercise to compare persons in 'direct' and 'derived' class locations. He concluded that "there is little to be gained by incorporating into the research programme of class analysis those individuals without employment, since they are not so different from their matching (employed) class counterparts" (ibid. : 93). Yet, Marshall did the mistake of assuming that the fit of data between responses of persons in 'direct' and 'derived' class positions is the central issue in contention. The real concern, on the other hand, revolves around issues of demographic class formation - that is, the extent to which class careers take on a perfect trajectory over and beyond the employment-retirement transition. Marshall's (ibid.) choice to evaluate the conventional hypothesis through solely quantitative research was erroneous on the grounds that patterns of demographic class formation are highly contingent upon interactions with significant others on the one hand, and subjective interpretations of turning points and local games of rivalry on the other (Bertaux and Thompson, 1997). This is only possible through

in-depth research that conflates the extensive-intensive and statistical-analytical antinomies.

It follows that the neglect of gerontological class relations goes beyond the fact that older persons tend to lie outside the socially defined 'productive' sector of the economy. Similar to the situation facing women in the past, the exclusion of older persons in class research is a case of - to paraphrase Acker (1973) - 'intellectual ageism'. Older persons are excluded in class research simply because of their 'oldness'. There seems to be an unwritten and ageist assumption that older persons have no direct or active role in present processes of class structuring and action except for a repository affect from their past relationships to production. It was precisely in this spirit that one uncovers five main lacunae in the 'derivative' strategy. First, even if occupation is deemed as a reliable source of class location, it is superficial to take past relations to production as present indicators of class positions. Indeed, historicity can induce a 'mismatch' between the level of power decreed by a job in different time periods : "occupational status is not a transhistorical concept i.e. it is possible that the status ascribed to jobs held by the elderly will have changed over their lifetime…the status ascribed to an office clerk in 1930 could have been very different from that in 1980" (Victor and Evandrou, 1989 : 255). Second, the derivative rationale overlooks how age relations hold an integral role in the way in which everyday life is experienced by older individuals. Studies showed clearly that, irrespective of their resources of material and symbolic capital, all older persons experience age discrimination. As Calasanti (2003 : 199) affirmed, "by not theorising age relations, social gerontologists embrace theoretical perspectives based upon midlife experiences that may not adapt well to studying old age". Third, the conventional position warrants too much explanatory power on past biographies. Although it is true that "men [sic] make their own history…under circumstances directly encountered from the past" (Marx, 1972 : 1), one must not neglect that "intelligence is essentially the ability to solve the problems of present behaviour…in the light of, or by reference to, both the past and the future…[involving] both memory and foresight" (Mead, 1962 : 100). Sensitivity to Mead's insight is highly warranted since studies showed that incoming older persons hold unprecedented levels of agency. Whilst in the past, later life was highly characterised by structured dependency, the coming of late

modernity provided older persons with higher levels of agency. A fourth problem is that the derivative rationale does not allow for any social mobility in retirement unless older persons re-enter the labour market in a diverse role. This is, however, misleading since relations of production serve only as catalysts, rather than determining mechanisms for class mobility. This notion was emphasised by O'Rand (2001 : 197) when highlighting how "stratification operates across societal planes extending from the economy and state through the community and household to the individual". The 'intellectual ageist' character of present studies is especially visible when researchers assume that later life can only characterised by downward class mobility. Finally, serious problems arise when the conventional approach is applied to older women. The latter are highly susceptible to changes in their marital status which, in turn, generates an apparent social mobility that may bear little or no relation to real change in mobility patterns : "Are older women in their own, or their husband's class? And is this class of pre-retirement "origin" (i.e., in younger age) or the social class of destination in old age, based on retirement income and assets?" (Estes, 1999 : 24-5). Resolving these issues is important because the coming of late modernity has not bypassed older women. Recent studies showed that more older women are approaching life in a non-traditional manner that is characterised by greater levels of social freedom and disattachment from male partners. This was also true with respect to older widows who demonstrate higher levels of strength, determination, and success in their efforts to confront the most profound transition of their lives.

The 'derivative' strategy is limited because it continues to perceive retirement as occurring in a society based on mass production when, in fact, industrial cultures have reached a 'late' phase of modernity. Herein, identities take on "reflexive organized endeavour" (Giddens, 1991 : 9) that operate on the basis of choice and flexibility and thus replacing the rigidity of the traditional life cycle with its predetermined rites of passage (Phillipson, 1998). The life course ceased to be a fixed set of stages occupied by people of specific age-brands - with ageing becoming increasingly marked by a blurring of what appeared previously to be the typical behaviour associated with this stage. Whilst in the past the ageing self tended to be based on past occupational biographies and incumbents' relationship to the welfare state, currently its preservation has be-

come a more open and individualist responsibility. Retirement as a social institution no longer constitutes the horizon where everyone foresees the pathway to be taken one day out of the labour force toward old age : "the old have moved into a new 'zone of indeterminacy' which is marginal to work and welfare" (Phillipson and Powell, 2004 : 22). The 'reflexive modernisation' of the ageing self is especially evident from the record levels of agency experienced by older persons, as they increasingly turn towards fashion, bodies, leisure, and homes as their preferred sites of cultural performance and identity creation. Yet, late modernity does not mean the end of traditional forms of inequalities since one "feature of retirement in a period of reflexive modernization suggests less positive development… namely, the growth of new inequalities alongside the continuation of traditional social divisions" so that "it is not that class, gender and other types of inequality become less important, [but] rather they become (re)defined and experienced in different ways to early periods of modernity" (Phillipson, 1999 : 323).

Ultimately, it is its inability to research the way class relations have become transformed as a result of both the late-modern and retirement transitions that constitutes the key limitation of the derivative strategy, and thus, what underlies its insignificance to the development of a suitable programme for gerontological class research. Whilst the 'derivative' approach may have been tenable in the past, nowadays its application is problematic. One must refrain from or be very cautious when hinging the operationalisation of older persons' class position according to their or breadwinner's final occupation prior to retirement.

**Age versus class stratification**

Standpoints advocating age-based forms of social inequality view the life course as encompassing a curvilinear trajectory of 'power' which peaks in the middle years before declining in later life. Most perspectives can be traced to age stratification theory whose basic premise was to argue that when social systems are age-graded - as they have become with the advance of modernity - age is a feature of not just individuals but also of the role structure of society (Riley et al., 1972). Social systems are characterised by more than roles with all established social systems having their own normative structure that dictates what is acceptable, appropri-

ate and possible for the various role incumbents within the system. The age stratification perspective, in other words, perceived age as both a process and structure, with individual ageing being conceptualised as a biopsychosocial process. Hence, it succeeded in capturing psychological and biological development as well as the experience of entering and exiting social roles. Allocation and socialisation are the processes that intervene between the social structures relating to people and those relating to roles. Whilst allocation refers to the process whereby individuals are continually assigned and reassigned to particular roles, socialisation alludes to teaching individuals how to perform new life course roles. In age stratification research, the age system of inequality is generally conceptualised in terms of the differences between older, middle-aged, and younger age strata. At a structural level, same-aged individuals form strata that may be defined on the basis of chronological age or biological, psychological, or social stages of development. Age, according to this view, is established in the social structure as a "criterion for entering or relinquishing certain roles" (ibid. : 7). The age stratification theory has by now evolved into the 'ageing and society paradigm' as Riley (and Riley, 1999) believed that the focus on the role of social structures in the process of individual aging and age stratification is best achieved by investigating the dynamic relationship between individual and structural changes. This paradigm has been geared to explain the processes that underlie the movement of age cohorts through time and age-related social structures, whilst also striving to comprehend better the relation between cohorts, social structures, and individual ageing processes.

Two key questions characterised this perspective : "do age inequalities lead to age conflicts throughout the society?" and "if such conflicts arise, how do they affect relations within and between classes?" (Foner, 1988 : 186). Although in an earlier paper it was stated that "the mere fact of inequality amongst age strata (as is true of other types of stratification also) is not a sufficient condition for age cleavage" (Riley et al., 1972 : 443), Foner answered the first affirmatively by developing an analogy between age and class inequality : "age inequalities occur because age is used as a criterion for assigning people to roles that are differentially rewarded. "Age strata" are formed as people of similar ages fill similar sets of age related roles…In this sense, age forms the basis of a stratification system" (Foner, 1988 : 178).

Other social thinkers predicted open age conflicts. Conceptualising the politics of ageing as a series of conflicts around economic class, political inequality, and cultural lifestyles, Turner (1989) perceived age as a meaningful dimension of social and welfare antagonism that becomes 'reified' in a model of direct conflict between younger and older cohorts. For Thompson (1989), the very nature of aged populations together with the relations between generations has experienced much change in the second half of the last century. The welfare generation are now arriving at old age with assets, expectations and histories of benefits quite unlike those of their predecessors, and it remains to be seen whether the young who are expected to make growing transfers to them will feel bound to do so : "at the twentieth century the implicit welfare contract that binds members of a successor generations is up for renegotiation - and the aged stand right at the centre of this with a great deal to lose" (ibid. : 35).

With respect to the second question, Foner (1988) argued that in theory age conflict has the potential to cut across class lines by motivating older and younger members from similar and different classes to oppose each other over diverse 'idealistic' standpoints. Nonetheless, she also acknowledged that in practice such a possibility is very improbable. This was due to the fact that the same general processes that have played a role in earlier eras are at work today to prevent age-based material inequalities taking precedence over economic issues : "age inequalities appear unlikely to spark sharp age cleavages that would supersede class issues to divide classes along age lines…[they] are not likely to become a significant threat to class solidarity" (ibid. : 187). Yet, Foner noted that this does not mean that young people's discontents will not find expression and possibly affect class cohesiveness in subtle ways :

> …strains between age groups may find expression in still another way : mild quarrels and disputes in specific institutional spheres. Thus in the workplace or in occupational associations, there are interpersonal disputes between younger and older workers. Although such disputes are not likely to lead to sharp cleavages within classes, they reduce class solidarity.
>
> Foner, 1988 : 187

This occurs because just as much as youth subcultures divert working-class youth from class-related activities within the workplace, competition between age groups in specific institutional spheres ranging from occupational to welfare associations also has the potential to suppress class tensions and deflect class tension in later life.

The strength of the age stratification approach is that it not only focused on the impact of class on age stratification and on class difference in the same age strata, but also on the impact of age stratification on the class system. Yet, its view that age stratification will eventually supersede class forms of inequality is a problematic one. One crucial shortcoming is that studies did not dedicate sufficient attention to the theoretical nature of the 'cohort' concept. By conceptualising it in an arbitrarily manner, the age stratification model ignored the subjective and qualitative dimensions of age-related experiences respectively. Another lacuna was that it failed to note the crucial differences between the class and age stratification systems. Probably the most central is that whereas an individuals' social class tends to be permanent, membership in different age strata is a fluid and expected process (McMullin, 2000). Yet, it is important to recognise that there are some similarities between the two system of inequality. McMullin noted that Dowd (1987) suggested that a central difference between social class and age lies in the existence of legal statutes that prohibit employment discrimination on the basis of age whilst no laws prohibit the hiring of managers over workers. In his own words, "the concept of discrimination simply does not extend to social class, a fact that underscores popular conceptions of the class hierarchy as 'natural' result of either a sifting process based on talent and ability or a more complicated process involving societal needs and differential socialization patterns" (ibid : 323). But as McMullin (2000) pointed out, this argument is somewhat misleading because it simplifies the complex and subtle structures of employment that perpetuate gender-, ethnic-, and age-based inequality.

Nevertheless, the age stratification stance failed to grapple with the fact that studies on age-related forms of distributive justice showed a stability of 'horizontal' inequality over the life course and across different household structures. Although recent developments in the relationship between aging and politics have engendered a 'new politics of old age',

one can draw from Walker (1999) to highlight five main barriers to the participation of older persons in age-related politics. First, contrary to popular perceptions, older people do not necessarily share a common interest by virtue of their age alone which transcends all other interests. Secondly, having been removed from playing any economic role in society, older people lack both cohesion and a means of challenging their inferior economic and social position. Third, pensioners often lack formal channels through which to exert political influence. Fourth, there are important physical and mental barriers to political participation in old age. Disability and socially disabling later life course events, such as widowhood, may further fragment political consciousness and discourage political activity. Finally, there is conservatism as the present older generations have different reference points to younger people, and early economic life is of particular importance in the formation of political consciousness and party allegiance. In fact, research found that older people voted along different party lines, rarely voted on age-related policy issues, and were less likely to be swing voters. If older persons did actually change their voting patterns they were more likely to swing towards conservative parties. Even if all older persons find themselves in equally difficult circumstances it will not be easy for them to regroup in a political entity. This is because, as Calasanti and Slevin (2001 : 185) pointed out, the term "'old' has little, if any, positive content", and hence, is unsuitable for collective imagery.

Despite the soundings of age stratification perspectives, there is no clear evidence of youths rising in protest against heavy taxation due to the requirement of the welfare state. Even if some young people are aware that they will not enjoy a standard of living as high as that of their parents, they do not seem to be blaming older people for this deplorable state of affairs.

**Cultures of ageing**

Another perspective which argued that class interests are waning in contemporary later life was the 'cultures of ageing' thesis advanced by Gilleard and Higgs. Advocating the distancing of gerontology from what they perceived as 'dated' theorisations of later life - especially, structured dependency theory and the political economy of ageing perspective

- Gilleard and Higgs embedded the study of later life in a Giddensian framework where the idea of being a consumer fits better than that of a citizen. The authors contended that the central concern through which to conduct social gerontology is to study "the multiplicity of sources that provide the texts and shape the practices by which older people are expected to contract their lives" (2000 : 22). In noting the greater spending power and improved health status of the baby boom generation, they argued that these people are unlike the pensioners of the past as their lives are based upon a third age lifestyle constructed in terms of leisure and fulfilment. For Gilleard and Higgs (ibid. : 23), class inequality has little to no purchase next to the multiplicity of sources that shape the everyday practices of third agers since "in such a polity the idea of being a consumer fits much better than that of being a citizen".

Rejecting the 'third age' concept as the result of either class- or cohort-related effects, they conceptualised it as a generational phenomenon. Their rationale was that third agers share all of Mannheim's (1997) three criteria for the making of generations - namely, a shared temporal location (generational site or birth cohort), shared historical location (generation as actuality - exposure to a common period or era), and finally, a shared socio-cultural location (generational consciousness or 'entelechy'). Whilst embedding the third age in the first two criteria are relatively straightforward - in that older persons in the (*circa*) '60-75' age bracket are located in similar birth cohorts, and thus, were exposed to a common period or era - it was Mannheim's (1997) third criterion that Gilleard and Higgs considered to be most crucial in establishing the third age as a unique generation. This was because they located present and incoming groups of third agers as constituting the first set of young-old individuals who experienced the birth and development of consumption during early and middle adulthood respectively. In fact, it was precisely this that prompted them to argue that class realities have mellowed in contemporary later life. The baby boom generation, in this view, has become distinct due to its absorption of a consumer culture that cuts across class so that it represents one of the few times that a generational division became more culturally significant than class strata. Recently, Higgs and Gilleard (2006 : 235) reiterated their claim that, in present times, class as a social identity has lost much of its mobilization power but also add that "it is no longer possible to assign people in retirement into a

distinct class category, residual, free-floating, or otherwise". This is largely because the varieties of positions that older persons can have in relation to the economy have multiplied extensively due to the diversification of individual histories, the decline of state-mediated bureaucratic ascription, and the globalization of the economy. Gilleard and Higgs (et al. 2005) also possess studies backing their view that birth cohort exercises a stronger historical influence on current consumption in later life when compared to class background as data found an increasing immersion in mass consumer society of successive cohorts who were born and grew up earlier in the 20th century.

Gilleard and Higgs' rationale is appealing as it stimulates novel ways of looking at later life, and sensitised gerontology to the pressures and crises affecting the lives of many older persons following the coming of late modernity. Their works also bring a breadth of fresh air to conceptualising the third age considering that Laslett's (1996) formulation contained class and cultural biases (Blaikie, 1999), blemished older and more defenceless people (Young and Schuller, 1991), and stood awkwardly next to the fact that more older persons are now seeking reintegration in the labour force (Henretta, 2001). Yet, other aspects of their work are problematic. Primarily, their critical focus was centred upon an orthodox account of political economy without, however, considering the growth of new types of structural inequality resulting from the intertwining of ageism, globalisation and reflexive modernisation (Phillipson, 2002). Secondly, it remains unclear whether the influence of class has receded quite to the extent as argued by Gilleard and Higgs. The authors, in fact, did not grapple with the manner that participation in consumption may be engaged as a means to class-related ends. Moreover, they remained aloof as to why despite improvements in pension payments, researchers still found groups of pensioners to be affected by poverty (Scharf et al., 2004). It has been argued that "contrary to the postmodernist claim that older age can lead to the dissolution of class divisions…retirement is increasingly more likely to give rise to a transmission and exacerbation of pre-existing inequalities" (Argyle, 2005 : 35, 36).

The 'cultures of ageing' thesis overemphasises the potential of agency - that is, the extent of the changes that have taken place and the degree of

freedom enjoyed by third agers (Walker, 2006). Thirdly, Gilleard and Higgs views stand awkwardly next to Mannheim's (1997 : 47) claim that "within any generation there can exist a number of differentiated, antagonistic generation-units" which "are oriented toward each other, even though only in the sense of fighting one another". Many academics, in fact, argued about the high possibility of 'older' generations to include 'generational units' on the basis of either class or gender disparities. As Abrams (1982) claimed, age is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the existence of generational units. Other factors such as class, religion, race, occupation, and institutional setting - that is, all the conventional categories of socio-structural categories of social-structural analysis - must be introduced to explain their unique ability to make something of historical experiences (ibid.). Finally, despite the fact that Gilleard and Higgs' (2002 : 44) refused that the 'third age' arises "as a shorthand for older and richer adults", one notes that throughout history, forms of generational consciousness tended to arise from the dispositions of the dominant classes. Indeed, it was Mannheim (1997) whose discussion on utopia documented how it is the middle/upper classes that are most actively involved in international and global processes. A case in point is that both the hippies and leftists who gave colour to the generational consciousness of the 1960s tended to come from privileged backgrounds whilst combat soldiers sent to Vietnam were predominantly working class and black. Applying this theme to later life, it seems highly logical to argue that that the third age habitus arises as a middle-class phenomena. After all, there can be no doubt as regards the "the interrelationship of SES, social class, multiple indicators of lifestyle, and outcomes across the life course" (Hendricks and Hatch, 2006 : 309).

Gilleard and Higgs sensitise us, and rightly, so to the increasing reflexivity held by older persons as a result of which they are able to exercise unprecedented choice concerning their lifestyles and approach to ageing. Yet, this position overlooks how older persons' lives are also constrained by their positions in the social structure so that a valid analysis of gerontological class relations must include both agency and structure in its analysis. In practice, this implies an empirical understanding of the constant tension between structure and agency in everyday life on one hand, and the life course on the other.

**Class, diversity, and the life course**

Studies on class in later life would be incomplete unless they incorporate the concept of diversity. There is no doubt as regards the importance of making gerontological research more representative and better able to apprehend the complexities' of people' lives when it comes to issues of gender, age, race and class. The latter represent interlocking systems of oppression whose relations must, as much as possible, feature strongly in studies on inequality.

Incorporating diversity implies that one distinguishes the concept from that of heterogeneity. The latter refers to those instances when social scientists warn that group stereotypes cannot be assumed to fit some or even most individuals, or that individuals grow older at different rates. Diversity, on the other hand, "refers to examining groups in relations to interlocking structural positions within a society" (Calasanti, 1996 : 148). Another important distinction must be made between content and approach diversity. Whilst content diversity imply a focus on group differences (e.g. sexual orientation, racial, ethnic, class, gender), approach diversity refers to a research emphasis on power and standpoint. Studies of diversity are concerned with interlocking hierarchies of power, with assessing group differences by situating them within the context of this power hierarchy. Examining subaltern groups from their very own standpoint, and thereby avoiding the categorisation of the group as 'deviant' or 'other', studies of diversity compare groups and assess differences by privileging the knowledge of the group in question, and by asking why and how these groups are oppressed. Recognising diversity implies the realisation that social reality is relational : "oppression only exists only to the extent that privilege does, and vice-versa; beginning with the experiences of the oppressed is necessary for understanding those who are privileged" (ibid. : 149).

For gerontological class research to incorporate diversity it must push on two fronts. On one hand, research has to be sensitive towards the ways that different positions of inequality - such as gender and age - influence class relations. To-date researchers have made great advances in documenting content diversity, as one finds ample studies documenting 'double' and 'triple' jeopardies (Stoller and Gibson, 2000). It is expected that

this book continues to contribute towards such knowledge. On the other hand, it has to work through a theoretical framework which outlines how class, together with gender and age, constitute interrelated sets of power relations rather than separate systems. Just as much as feminists are right in arguing that gender and class relations feed into each other, the same must be acknowledged as regards the interface between class and age. One must not fall into the trap of simply 'adding on' either the consideration of age into class research or vice versa. Diverse oppressive configurations produce different qualitative experiences and consequences, rather than just quantitative variations. Following the basic premise of age stratification theory, which states that age and class serve as key social organising principles, it ensues that older persons experience exclusion as well as inclusion on the basis of both their chronological ages and class position. Since such experiences occur at both micro- and macro-levels, a distinction between 'interlocking' and 'intersectional' unequal systems must be upheld :

> …the notion of interlocking oppression refers to the macro level connections linking systems of oppression such as race, class, and gender…the notion of intersectionality describes micro-level processes…how each individual and group occupies a social position with interlocking structures of oppression described by the metaphor of intersectionality.
>
> Collins, 1995 : 492

Hence, a focus on diversity demands attention to the role of interlocking systems of inequality, and how these manifest themselves on both the macro and micro levels of. In this way, it becomes possible to move beyond established and limited 'ways of thinking' to capture the intimate interdependence of age and class relations on one hand, and societal ageing on the other. Moreover, one can never ignore Mills' (1959 : 3) tenet that "neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both". The focus on diversity must be embedded in a historical context for, as Riley et al. (1988) pointed out, a sociology of age must be founded on the principle that ageing is a lifelong process. Indeed, class-related inequalities are the result of past and

present experiences, as well as anticipatory expectations. This is theoretically and empirically possible by linking gerontological class research with the life course perspective. Entailing a concern with development, ageing, maturation, and status passages, the life course rationale focuses on processes which are intimately associated with the irreversible direction of time. The hallmark of this perspective lies in its explicit attempt to link individual biography with the context of society, as well as taking into account a historical perspective on both the individual and society. Though there is no consensus as to the key principles of the life course perspective, Elder's (1985) principles of 'ageing as a lifelong process', 'historical time and place', 'timing of lives', 'linked lives', and 'human agency' remain the best guide.

The life course perspective holds three major benefits towards our goals and objectives. First, it aids an understanding of class positions as forming part of lifelong trajectories whereby a given class location is characterised by a certain level of indeterminacy. Focusing on the class habitus on the one hand, and individual's personal, familial, and societal biography on the other, researchers achieve the potential to investigate (i) how class dynamics are underpinned to the complexities arising from the interplay between actors' cultural dispositions constraints and conscious aspirations, (ii) the influence of 'general' and 'significant' others on class relations, and (iii), why certain subjects and not others experience particular class trajectories. Secondly, the life course perspective also enables social scientists to investigate how the interplay between gender and class not only shapes men's and women's lifestyles and life-chances during their early adult years, but continues to do so even throughout later life. Through its emphasis on a holistic (rather than age-segmented) approach to the interplay between human lives and social structures, the life course perspective aids culturalist class research to shed light on the (i) effects of gender on class relations - that is, how men and women experience distinct class trajectories despite being in similar roles and relationships, (ii) circumstances which promote continuities and discontinuities over the life span in roles, health, and resources according to gender and class, and (iii), role of turning points in gender-related trajectories of class advantage and disadvantage. Finally, a life-course perspective facilitates an understanding of the complex interplay between the 'stratification of the life course' and the 'stratification over the life course'

(Dewilde, 2003). The stratification of the life course concerns the manner in which the relationships between the state, the market and the family generate social differentiation and social inequality between different population groups on the basis of various criteria, such as age, life stage, and gender. Stratification over the life course refers to processes of differentiation or heterogeneity that unfold during the life course, particularly trajectories of economic inequality. This twinning focus contributes a better understanding of individual and collective experiences over time, whilst also explaining the short- and long-range causes and consequences of these patterns.

This chapter highlights the lacunae found in gerontologists' attempts to examine class relations in later life, as well as provide possible paths of guidance to amend such matters. It emerges that class research in later life has a different analytical orientation than when conducted with adults. The reason is the distinctiveness of later life. Gerontological class research must definitely be sensitive to those things that make older persons different from other adults, and later life different from the rest of adulthood. These include an increased likelihood of failing health or chronic health conditions, and with the death of parents, spouses and friends a more restricted but intense social relationships and networks. The distinctiveness of later life implies strongly that instead of employing the same programmes of class research that apply to younger people, gerontologists should develop new concepts and ranking scales to study the class position and role in class relations of those beyond the working years. This book strives to achieve such a goal by merging Bourdieu's class model on one hand, and a focus on diversity and the incorporation of the life course perspective on the other.

Now that a research programme has been outlined, the coming three chapters focus on the analysis and interpretation of data emerging from the empirical work.

# 4

# DRAWING BOUNDARIES : CLASSES AND THE HIERARCHICAL SPACE

## Class relations and population ageing in Malta

*Class relations*

The genesis of the present forms of class formation in Malta may be traced to three historical factors. First, 1960s politics during which the Nationalist [Conservative] Party (NP) was supported by the Roman Catholic Church to win two successive elections to the detriment of the Malta Labour Party (MLP). Under the charismatic leadership of Dom Mintoff, and with widespread support from the largest union on the island, the MLP had by this time established a reputation as the defender and supporter of the Maltese 'manual' worker. On the other hand, as the result of its success in attracting foreign investment the NP boasted extensive support from the petty bourgeoisie, professional bodies, and aspiring middle-class families. The Church had perceived the MLP's 1962 and 1966 electoral manifestos as a direct attack on the Bishop so that it interdicted Labour leaders whilst declaring it a mortal sin to vote for the party. This situation was an issue of major concern for Labour supporters since "to remain a Labour supporter, a person had to forego the Church sacraments that he [sic] has been brought up to believe vital to his [sic] happiness and spiritual salvation" (Boissevain, 1993 : 98). This was the cause of much animosity on behalf of the working class towards the both the NP and the Church, an acrimony that is still experienced today amongst older cohorts.

The second factor consists of the MLP's era in government (1971-1987) following the party's signatory peace with the Church in 1969. The MLP implemented radical changes in local political economy. In addition to a notorious anti-colonial campaign, the MLP nationalised various private enterprises, founded state-owned companies, and constructed a socialist

national identity by building stronger links with Soviet Russia, North Korea, and China on one hand, and abolishing the privileges traditionally held by the professional classes and the Church on the other. The goal of the MLP government was to facilitate a national socialist transition by locating an urban working class, and narrowing down the economic gaps between the upper and working classes. During this period, Maltese situation mirrored that in Eastern Europe as the state not only 'venerated' the working class but also proclaimed it as the vanguard community for the establishment of a more equitable society. Such political attitudes were strongly opposed by the middle and upper classes, and the Church, so that this period was characterised by much political instability and violence. Mintoff's socialism - especially his battle-cry of *'Min mhux maghna kontra taghna'* (tr. 'those who are not with us are against us') - served to polarise working class and middle class identities on opposite poles of a continuum. Whilst the material improvement experienced by the working class bestowed them with a national-cum-socialist identity as more than poor natives of a 'marginal state', the MLP's aggressive socialist policies led for the first time towards the political formation of a united middle-class (Baldacchino, 2002).

The third and final factor concerns Malta's experiences following the NP's return to government in 1987 on a manifesto of democracy, justice and pro-Europeanism. As the NP diverted Malta's economy towards a liberal market economy, significant policy implementations included the stopping of time-of-lieu in favour of the full payment of overtime, introducing a 40-hour working week for all employees, and providing monetary compensation to workers who had participated in union directives against the MLP government. The NP succeeded in increasing the opportunities for continuing and tertiary education, whilst also adding to the rates of professional, administrative, managerial, and clerical employment at the expense of unskilled employment. These changes were central to defuse the 'working class - middle class' hostility which characterised previous decades and take the class system to a more multifarious level. In the early 1990s, Giddens (1994 : xxxi) noted "the class map of Malta is changing, in ways roughly similar to those found in other comparable societies… class structure has today become complex and various tensions exist between the old and new middle classes as well as within elite groups". The past decade was characterised by the question

of whether Malta should become a member of the EU. Whilst the middle/upper classes were in favour as they held a strong affinity with European local culture and believed that competing in the broad EU market would improve their earning power, the working class resisted EU accession to scale down the possibility of increasing job competition. Therefore, and as may be expected, EU accession was supported and resisted by the NP and MLP parties respectively. The nation eventually opted in favour of EU accession both in the 2003 referendum and in the wake of the NP's victory at the 2003 election. Malta became an official EU member on 1 of May 2004.

The sociological literature on local class relations takes two opposing paths : Marxist and Weberian. The latter is founded on the argument that the absence of data on the distribution of wealth and rising number of professionals, as well as the distribution of privileges according to a meritocracy of educational capital, necessitates the rooting of the local class structure upon a 'status-groups' ranking rather than an economic power in the Marxist sense (Vassallo, 1989). The Weberian stand received substantial support as Zammit (1994) found that most Maltese workers perceived class structuring in Malta in harmonious rather than conflicting views, and accepted that income differentials are based on educational ability rather than class inequality. Malta also includes a rising 'new' middle class which distinguishes itself from other middle and working classes by consuming distinctive objects and services rather than through economic differentiation. Yet, this position failed to address the reproduction of class differences by education or how power holders also possess high levels of economic resources (Sultana, 1994b). Moreover, it forwarded no empirical evidence backing the decomposition of the class structure in the Marxist sense or the advent of class relations in the Weberian sense, and no attempt is made to inject a gender twist in the study of local class relations. The Marxist approach to the study of local class relations built upon various local literature to posit that a Marxist analysis elicits three class groupings (Sultana, 1994b). The latter included the dominant and subordinate classes with a 'petty bourgeoisie' class in between. The Marxist approach contained a number of strengths as it delineated the lines of and reasons for conflict between the two major classes, and showed clearly how the economy engendered particular

forms of class formation. Yet, it is not without issues. Whilst it failed to inject a gender twist in the study of local class relations, its line of argument was too 'deterministically evolutionist' and 'uni-casual'. As Giddens (1994 : xxxi) argued "the class map of Malta is changing, in ways roughly similar to those found in other comparable societies…class structure has today become complex and various tensions exist between the old and new middle classes as well as within elite groups. It is also not enough to mark the working class as those who depend on others for a living as there are various class fractions. Moreover, this path overlooked the particular alliances between different classes, as well as the role and influence of the Roman Catholic Church on the local class system.

Following such difficulties in neo-Marxist and neo-Weberian analyses of Maltese classes, the futility of orthodox programmes becomes more apparent when one considers the unique nuances characterising local society (Baldacchino, 1993). Malta has always been, and still remains, a service economy with its inhabitants locked in a perennial struggle to exploit, maximise, and cash in geopolitical variables. It is therefore fallacious to argue that the elite derive their power solely from ownership and market relations, or over the control over productive capacity. On a processual plane, one finds other unique features that continue to undermine the validity of orthodox class research. For instance, the 'perverse' distribution of income whereby skilled manual workers do not generally declare their total income on tax returns, and therefore appear financially worse off than a waged-salariat. Moreover, Malta includes a substantial underground economy resulting from do-it-yourself jobs and multiple jobs successively, as well as a widespread existence of small enterprises generating low market wages and conditions, lower trade representation, and less tribunal protection from arbitrary management. There is also the problem of evaluating class positions of public jobs which account directly for half of the labour force. Finally, orthodox approaches to class are unable to deal with the way class politics occur through the mechanisms of clientelism conducted through a system of patronage. Indeed, the "pinnacle of class structure in Malta is occupied by an organisational triumvirate enjoying significant inter-family connections and collisions, whose members have a very ample presence on a large number of company directorships and state appointed boards" (ibid. : 25).

The neo-Marxist and neo-Weberian approaches to class analysis in Malta are riddled with shortcomings. One needs to go beyond such lacunae by working within a research programme that is less preoccupied with *a priori* conceptualisation and leaves room for some important fine-tuning. Again, it is clear that Bourdieu's class model is highly opportune to deal with the unique nuances found in Maltese socio-economic dynamics since his sociological contributions to the sociology of class are, ultimately, a set of 'thinking tools' visible through the results they yield, rather than a 'theory' as such.

*Population ageing*

Malta qualifies well as an 'aged' society. Its population structure has evolved out of a traditional pyramidal shape to an even-shaped block distribution of equal numbers at each age cohort except at the top. Moreover, older persons in Malta are increasingly challenging the traditional cum-passive role of retirement by taking part in a wide range of civic and leisure activities. In 2007, life expectancy at birth reached 77 and 82 years for men and women respectively (NSO, 2008). At the end of 2007, 14% (54,742 persons) of the Maltese population were aged 65 years and over. Persons in the 75+ age brackets totalled 23,786 - that is, 6% and 43% of the total population and the 65+ cohort respectively. Similar to international statistics, women and widows are over-represented in the local 65+ cohorts. A national *Lifestyle Survey* (NSO, 2003a) distributed to a representative sample of 65+ aged persons found that 28% persons owned a car, 12% smoked, and 21% consumed alcohol. Favourite hobbies included 'book-reading' (26%) followed by 'gardening' (20%), 'sewing/ knitting' (18%), and 'bingo' (15.2%). The survey found 40% and 23% to be overweight and obese respectively, 33% and 9% believed that Malta 'is in a financial crisis' and 'does not have any financial problems' respectively, and 67% claimed that they saved 'nothing or almost nothing'. The favourite leisure opportunities for elderly persons remain those associated with traditional pastimes where *bocci* (a game similar to French *boules*) and bingo comprised important relaxation avenues for males and females respectively. Yet, this seems too stereotypical in the light of more recent research which highlights the substantial number of local community councillors over the age of 60, the thriving of the Uni-

versity of the Third Age in Malta, and the increase of older person as consumers of travel packages. Older persons in Malta are increasingly searching for gratifying activities and pursuing new roles in society. This broad change in activity can be seen occurring with respect to all different domains of life such as paid work, domestic activities, care (e.g. personal care, family care), and leisure which can be either active (e.g. creative activities, community activities, sportive activities, hobbies, social leisure, education, entertainment, travel) as well as passive (e.g. television, radio, internet, and reading). Moreover, community work such as voluntary or unpaid work appears to be a domain of activity that is being 'discovered' after retirement when people make choices about additional free time. On average, a lot of unpaid work takes place is taking place following retirement although it is still remains that volunteering is an activity that is most actively pursued by older persons if it was already carried out before retirement.

Malta has a 'two-thirds' state pension and it is rare for older persons to hold a private pension. The state pension is payable to persons on their 60$^{th}$ (females) or 61$^{st}$ (males) birthday. The maximum pension is 202 euros weekly. Widows who were never in paid employment receive five-ninths of their husbands' pension. Rates are also supplemented by weekly and half-yearly bonuses of 3 euros and 135 euros respectively. The *Household Budgetary Survey 2000* (NSO, 2003b) reported that the average weekly income amongst the 60+ was 171 euros (national average = 367 Euros). Two groups of older persons are especially in receipt of high income levels : migrants who hold pensions from high-income countries and older persons in paid employment. On the other hand, as much as 25% of one-person households aged 65+, as well as couples with one member at least 65 years, fall under the 'risk-of-poverty-line' (NSO, 2003b). Other statistics reported that in 2005, persons aged 55+ in full-paid employment amounted to 11,110 males (11%) and 2,869 females (3%) (NSO, 2006). Older employed persons received an average annual gross salary of 16,648 Euros albeit an average net salary was of 13,492 Euros, and spend a greater proportion of income on 'food, beverage and tobacco', 'housing and energy', and 'health' when compared to younger peers (NSO, 2003b).

Older persons are generally in good health although a high proportion of the 75+ are frequent users of clinics, hospitals, and community services. In 2005, the main cause of death included 'diseases of the circulatory system' (NSO, 2006). In the past, the family constituted a robust pillar for older care, and given a choice the majority of older persons prefer receiving care and support from their family members and friends for as long as possible. Yet, in reaction to the fact that the increasing number of women in the workforce following careers meant a decline in carer availability, in the 1990s the state set up a range of services to help older persons remain living independently in the community (Troisi and Formosa, 2006). In 2005, these included home-care help, meals-on-wheels, Telecare, telephone-bill rebate, senior centres, handyman service, and the incontinence service. Nevertheless, in 2005 there were as much as 3,039 (4%) persons residing in state, religious, and private homes, with 994 (1%) applicants awaiting admission. More older persons own their homes today than in the past : 63% in 2000, compared with 59% in 1990 (NSO, 2003b). Yet, it is also true that older persons tend to be concentrated in older housing which is in a poor state of repair and which requires much structural adaptation as families age.

To-date there exists no study on the ways that gerontological class relations arise in Maltese society although some studies in the field of older adult education found that such adult education programmes have been hijacked by middle-class older persons and manipulated in a way that served to increase the social distinction held by this particular class (Formosa, 2000, 2005). It is hoped that this book serves as a catalyst to revert such a trend.

This chapter will now provide information about the class groupings and factions as uncovered by the empirical project. Three classes were found amongst the older Maltese community - namely, the working class, the middle class, and the dominant class, each containing a number of class factions. Table 4.1 overleaf pinpoints the key characteristics and levels of capital by the different class and class factions.

| Table 1 : Classes and class factions in the social space | |
|---|---|
| **Dominant class - Culture of elitism** | |
| *Dominant faction* Professional careerists | *Taste for exclusivity*. Owning very high levels of social and cultural capital, individuals had successful careers in civil society. |
| *Dominated faction* Wealthy metropolitans | *Taste for exclusivity*. Holding very high levels of social and economic capital, individuals who in the past owned commercial companies. |
| **Middle class - Culture of reflexivity** | |
| *Dominant faction* 'Old' middle class | *Taste for conscientiousness*. Rich in economic and cultural capital, this class faction was largely composed of third- and fourth-generation middle-class families. |
| *Intermediate faction* 'New' middle class | *Taste for post-materialism*. Record levels in cultural levels, members were able to latch on a 'third age' lifestyle, and thus, experiencing 'horizontal' class mobility. |
| *Dominated faction* Déclassé | *Taste for conformism*. Sparse and good levels of economic and cultural capital. In recent times, members experienced a sharp decline in their volume and value of their class resources. |
| **Working class - Culture of necessity** | |
| *Dominant faction* Affluentials | *Taste for hedonism*. Comparatively rich in economic capital, this class faction felt divided between their historical ties with needy peers and present economic affluence. |
| *Intermediate faction Suburban blues* | *Taste for utilitarianism*. Low levels of economic capital. Holding a desire for a modern lifestyle, subjects' lives were directed by a constant search for the best bargain. |
| *Dominated faction* Traditionalists | *Taste for deference*. Sparse levels of capital. Worked in proximity with dominant class, whilst celebrating and renouncing local and modern culture respectively. |

**The culture of necessity : The working class grows old**

The working-class is found at the powerless end of the class continuum. This class is composed of unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled manual workers in retirement. Although all members were bound together in a culture of 'necessity', the class did not hold a unitary set of dispositions. Interviews uncovered three class factions. The life course of working-class elders incorporated two key factors. First, they tended to experience an 'early' timing with respect to central familial transitions. Many married and had children very early in life, even before they had established themselves at work, and found a long-term and suitable residence. This had lasting aversive affects on their economic situation :

> "I married young, my wife was just 18 years old. We were both very inexperienced. As soon as we married my wife became pregnant and that started a search for better accommodation and a better-paying job...Life was one whole big race. We were always trying to keep up with bills, doctor fees, rent. I had a very basic wage and no possibility for advancement…" (Jules)

Secondly, they were badly served by, and not successful in, the educational system. When younger they found it difficult to draw any connection between their familial and neighbourhood background, the academic and analytical demands of the school, and future job opportunities. Members in this class were not prepared by their parents to cope at school and were easily labelled as 'educational failures' by teachers, something which transformed into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The life course of women in this class was firmly located in 'domesticity'. Wives did not perceive themselves as 'retired' or that their present life was much different from that experienced during late adulthood since they still remained responsible for most of the housework, taking care of frail relatives, and looking after grandchildren. They were socialised, both by their families and secondary agents of socialisation (most notably, the Church) in the role of a 'housewife' who is primarily responsible for the running of the household and rearing of children. This generated a strong sense of a division of labour between wife and hus-

band. The household was the women's dominion although wives always requested the approval of their husbands for their decisions. Despite their authority in the household they were still economically dependent on their husbands, with this patriarchal ambience emerging strongly in their belief that it did not bode well to think beyond their domestic responsibilities. This situation was not resisted and even accepted. Women highlighted the strong feelings they held for their children and which made 'life worth living'. Marriage and motherhood were their primary access to prestige in the community, so that the roles of 'Mum' and 'Grandma' were much desired.

The principal and recurrent characteristic highlighting the lives of working-class elders was a strong awareness of relative, and sometimes absolute, poverty. Many highlighted how their pension was insufficient to enable them to lead a satisfactory quality of life. They bought cheaper food, made do with old clothes and shoes, were ever-ready to pick up abandoned furniture and electric appliances, delayed going to a doctor when sick, avoided turning on the lights and electrical appliances during winter, and could not afford a car (or more than a minimum amount of petrol per month). Despite Gilleard and Higgs' (2000) 'cultural thesis', it is clear that a significant segment of older Maltese persons cannot afford to live a third age lifestyle, or are only able to, if they economised on more necessary items (e.g. such as in their consumption of electricity/water, washing of clothes, and eating of meat, fish and fresh vegetables). Working-class elders inhabited a culture of 'necessity' as their lifestyle was characterised by an inescapable deprivation of necessary goods so that they approached their everyday lives as a resignation to the inevitable. In Bourdieu's (1984 : 178) terms, the "taste of necessity can only be the basis of a life-style in itself which is defined as such only negatively, by an absence, by the relationship of privation between itself and other lifestyles". It is noteworthy that the term 'necessity' has a wider meaning in consumer societies, and implies the ability to have access to whatever passes for a 'normal' and 'happy' life rather than being able to hold on to simply basic material prerequisites. For working-class elders, retirement arose as a levelling experience as their lack of an ability to live with grace and comfort engendered a sense of vulnerability and insecurity. Lives were characterised by a tension of having to juggle one's life's necessities with consumerist expectations, a situation which

led to social suffering as they struggled to change their aspirations and accommodate their increasing frustrations. The general feeling amongst working-class elders was that powers beyond their control put them in a seemingly unending amount of free-time coupled with an inability to make use of it. This situation inculcated endless boredom : "I stay in-doors a lot to save money…but there is nothing to do" (Jules) and "I never have enough money to do anything much…it get tiring staying indoors on Sundays" (Jules). As Bauman (1998 : 38) argued, "desiring comes free, but to …experience desire as a pleasurable state, requires resources".

Empirical work found the working class to include three class factions - namely, 'traditionalists' 'suburban blues', and 'affluentials'. Due to unique flows and trajectories in the life-course career each faction held unique dispositions towards the common culture.

*Traditionalists*

Sitting in his old armchair, Ernest looked affectionately at his wife who was cooking a *timpana* (a Maltese traditional dish of pasta and minced meat in pastry baked in an oven) and his two nephews playing with cars and soldiers on the floor. "You came here to learn about our lives", he said at one point, "well, this is my life, surrounded by family, enjoying things that money cannot buy". The 'family is my world' sentiment was echoed by all traditionalists as they reacted to their economical distress by shunning consumption in favour of a laid-back and simple lifestyle that revolved around traditional familial roles. Adapting to the onset of later life in a passive and take-it-easy manner, they planned their days around family-centred activities, so as to alleviate (successfully) the pain arising from a consciousness of relative poverty.

The crucial characteristic in traditionalists' lives concerned their work history, as well as a lifelong and strict indoctrination in Roman Catholicism. Interviewees demonstrated a strong belief in the basic philosophy professed by the Church which stresses a communal relation with a God who created the world in his [sic] image. Subjects in class faction worked in low-status and -paying jobs which, nevertheless, brought them

into direct and emotional contact with their employers. This embedded them into a 'personalistic' relation with their employees :

> "My husband worked as a beadle…he was always running errands for [an ex-government Minister] whom we knew well. He accompanied [the Ministers'] children to school, did odd jobs at his house, chauffeured his car when his driver was unavailable…I also used to give a helping hand to [the Ministers' wife] during parties and receptions. We did everything voluntarily because we were like one big family." (Francesca)

Traditionalists did not identify with superiors, yearn for upward mobility, or form an attachment to other workers. They showed acute reverence towards their past employers - as well as priests and politicians - and treated superiors as an ascriptive elite leading the Maltese citizens in the pursuit of 'national' as opposed to 'sectoral' interests :

Members in this class faction were embedded in a habitus of deference - that is, an endorsement of "a moral order which legitimises their own political, material, and social subordination" (Parkin, 1971 : 84). Deference must be perceived as more of a conformism to a set of social expectations to some role within a particular power structure rather than merely as an attitude. Data supported other sociologists' investigations which found that 'deference' does not necessarily arise as a rural phenomenon (e.g. Newby, 1977). Thus, this book refutes to situate class power along a 'folk-urban' continuum. Indeed, Tonnies' (1957) *Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft* distinction was constructed as a conceptual and typological category rather than as a taxonomical base. The deferential disposition was reflected in traditionalists' interest in the organic preservation of community, tradition, and history. They believed that social hierarchy is ascribed at birth rather than achieved, and that social networks and obligations actually link a benevolent superior and a respectful subordinate. Despite their sparse levels of class capital, and contrary to all other class factions in the working class, traditionalists supported social and political doctrines which defended the institutions and the social values of the existing order. They sought to sustain and renovate rather than revolutionise the social fabric : "My life principle is if its not broken do

not fix it! If you can do without it do not buy it! I am appalled at the rate that my grandchildren change their mobiles, cars, and clothes" (Timothy). Indeed, members in this class faction celebrated and renounced local and global culture respectively, whilst stigmatising bourgeois modernity in favour of an 'authentic' local tradition. Ernest, who changed his jobs to suite his passion for bird-hunting, did not remember the last time he set foot in a theatre or cinema, did not know how to drive, and never went abroad.

Traditionalists held strict observance towards the values of *ghaqal* (tr. 'prudence' - a combination of cautious submissiveness with sensibility) and *bzulija* (tr. 'diligence' - a natural inclination for working hard) which, according to Zammit (1994), constitute the traditional Maltese value of honour. Members in this class faction were completely withdrawn from the pursuit of economic and status goals which are the dominant criteria of success in contemporary Maltese society. On the contrary, they emphasised camaraderie and solidarity which they consigned to the apex of their value system. There was also an association between deference and age. Traditionalists were older than other members in the remaining class factions so that it was evident that deferential dispositions may be related to a location in a specific historical-social situation. Older members of the working class may have acquired a cluster of deferential attitudes through parental influence sometime in the nineteen-thirties and -forties when most communities were characterised by a differentiated occupational structure and an interactional status system. The latter is vital for the engendering of deferential habitus because it is in such a system individuals that can place others on the basis of a detailed knowledge of each others' personal qualities. This leads to general consensus about the rank order of the status groups in the community. The lives of traditionalists were characterised by firm 'internal' and 'external' forms of continuity. Subjects sought to preserve a high level of 'ontological security' in the face of the dynamism and uncertainty by clinging on to a coherent culture within well-defined traditions. In this respect, the deferential habitus arose as a dialectical project - that is, both as an unconscious coercion that colours the conservatives' ideals and perceptions, as well as something to latch on to so as to safeguard oneself from increasing levels of 'risk' as engendered by the coming of late modernity.

*Suburban blues*

Kate led me towards the living-room since, in her own words, "meeting guests in the sitting-room is not so practical and surely less comfortable…we can be more relaxed and comfortable in the living room, as well as being near the kitchen for refreshments". Taking a seat on a Formica chair surrounded by matching furniture, it was easy to notice the various modern appliances and accessories that cluttered the family's living space : washing machine, fridge, toaster, juice-blender, microwave oven and a radio-cassette recorder in the kitchen, and a television set, computer, digital camera, and a CD player. Contrary to the traditionalists' ascetic approach, suburban blues held strong aspirations to live a modern lifestyle. Many furnished their houses in an ostentatious and flamboyant manner through mass-produced chandeliers, statues, candle sticks, painting reproduction, and figurines which stood side-to-side with numerous bric-a-brac and kitsch objects. This was because one key source of prestige was to live in a 'modern' house equipped with relatively up-to-date appliances so as to distance themselves from their disadvantaged origins. Subjects also invested much energy in projecting a modern bodily appearance as they turned for interviews in relatively new clothes, males carrying their mobile phone on trouser-belts and females modelling recently dyed hair. To understand the lives of suburban blues, 'modernity' must not be recognised as simply a social or spatial project but as an 'ideal' - that is, a producer of cultural meanings and psychic landscapes :

> "I have been through a lot of things in life, mostly unpleasant things. After so much suffering it is only appropriate that I enjoy myself. Look at that stereo system. I bought it last January during the sales…I say enjoy today because you never know what tomorrow brings. It is important that you make the most of your life" (Roger)

Members in this class faction had an extensive history in manual occupations in large-scale corporations so that, unlike traditionalists, they shared a strong experience of the conventional proletariat culture. They held jobs for long stretches of time in industries which tend to concen-

trate workers together and isolate them from the wider influences of society. Members in this class faction were proud to have done 'men's work' and held a strong sense of shared occupational experiences that engendered high feelings of fraternity and comradeship for others with similar life careers. It was clear that the values expressed through these social networks emphasise mutual aid in everyday life and a resistance to be an individual - that is, to be 'different'. At the same time, suburban blues voiced immense satisfaction at reaching retirement as they emphasised immense dissatisfaction with the past work situation as they highlighted how advancing technology threatened their range of skills and how their jobs were dirty, noisy and generally unpleasant and dangerous. They also reflected upon the inadequacy and unfairness of the wages they were awarded, and the unsympathetic ways in which supervisors and managers treated them. Suburban blues were extremely unhappy with their pension income and held very strong feelings of relative poverty as their financial situation failed to match their aspirations to live a modern lifestyle. One can easily understand the situation of suburban blues as money is, indeed, the sole entry permit for consumer actions such as eating out, travelling, and frequenting health and fitness clubs. The situation becomes more precarious as suburban blues get older due to the increasing costs of medicines and rising inflation whilst their pensions remain static. The sky which is the limit for consumer action rises ever higher whilst the level of members' resources goes lower and lower.

Suburban blues tended to accept the situation as irreversible and in their pains to make the most of they got, held a habitus of utilitarianism. As they strove to consume just like the 'Joneses', suburban blues worked hard to minimise expenses whilst maximising gratification. Thus, buffet dinners, state-subsidised services, multi-purpose accessories, bargain-hunting, and second-hand cars were highly popular. The key disposition in their lives was to make the most of their economical capital by budgeting well and bargain deals. It was therefore unsurprising that it was suburban blues who exhibited most examples of kitsch such as memorabilia in honour of British Royal Family, car models, cheap souvenirs, dinner sets imitating more elegant styles, and advertising calendars. Indeed, "the taste for trinkets and knock-knacks which adorn the mantelpieces and hallways [of the working class] is inspired by an intention unknown to economics and ordinary aesthetes, that of obtaining maxi-

mum effect at minimum cost" (Bourdieu, 1984 : 379). The absence of luxury goods - such as whiskey, paintings, champagne, concerts, cruises, art exhibitions, caviar and antiques meant that the lifestyle of the suburban blues was characterised by the presence of numerous cheap substitutes for these rare goods such as sparkling white wine for champagne, imitation leather for real leather, reproductions for paintings, all of which may be regarded as "indices of a dispossession at the second power, which accepts the definition of the goods worthy of being possessed" (ibid : 386). The ubiquitous presence of mass cultural products in the lives of suburban blues not only reproduced, reactivated, and reinforced the social relations which underline the working-class experience of the world, but also functioned to make the product of their everyday efforts as 'alienated' labour. It is, however, noteworthy that there was a number of individuals who were more sensitive to their place in the unequal and hierarchal social system. They were strong supporters of the MLP and committed towards the establishment of an alternative society that holds higher levels of social equity.

The suburban class faction showed ways of behaving - such as in eating, talking, domestic, rituals, shopping behaviour, and clothes - associated with the archetypal working-class identity as represented in mainstream literature and motion pictures. With some exceptions, members welcomed the post-industrial transformation of contemporary, but without taking any reflexive stand on the social and moral implications of such change. Suburban blues preferred to join the consumer bandwagon, and try to 'make it' by consuming the most affordable of objects. This smooth working of the habitus functioned to accommodate suburban blues to changes in their social conditions and embodied sense of the world whilst minimising their awareness of suffering.

*Affluentials*

John and his wife live in a high-rise apartment in an upmarket locality, but as soon as I complimented them on the view they made sure that I got no false impressions : "Do not be tricked by this apartment. We have always worked for our bread. This apartment is the most one can ask for but our lives are similar to other honest workers. Look at my hands. I spent 40 years panel-beating and spraying cars!" (John). Over tea and

biscuits John's wife emphasised their working-class background by highlighting the sacrifices they made for their children but their disappointment that neither son nor daughter considering getting a tertiary education, John's long hours and difficulties at work, and his wife's fifteen-year caring role for her unmarried uncle and aunt who both died from cancer. John's wife inherited her relatives' houses and savings, which enabled them to purchase the apartment and afford an active leisure lifestyle. Indeed, in recent years John and his wife travelled abroad about twice a year, ate out regularly, and always attended the weekend breaks that are organised regularly by their circle of friends.

Affluentials included subjects characterised by relatively high levels of economic capital when compared to their other levels of class capital. They consisted of a subgroup within the working class who, following a lifelong embodiment in the culture of necessity, experienced a sharp rise in their economic affluence. This condition generally arose as a result of either under-declaring occupational income so that families reached later life equipped with significant amounts of savings or being in receipt of a recent and promising familial inheritance. Other families in this class consisted of return migrants from Australia and Canada with extensive savings plus prosperous pensions. The idiosyncratic pattern of a lifelong position in the culture of necessity on one hand, and a present situation of relative affluence on the other, imbued members in the affluential class faction with a feeling of dis-embeddedness. Following their recent break from the shared phenomenological experiences associated with the working-class lifestyle affluentials lost their 'sense of coherence'. They held ambivalent orientations towards the class system and their roles in it. Despite their material comfort, affluentials still lived relatively frugal lives as they exclaimed that they could not bring themselves purchasing more expensive objects and services when visiting the supermarket, looking around for household items, or booking their holidays : "We always go for best product for the right price…if it serves its purpose well we go for it…why pay more?" (Alfred).

Nevertheless, whilst affluentials felt close to the materialist attitudes associated with the working-class lifestyle, they were also aware of an (economic) distance between them and working-class peers. This generated deep feelings of anomie to which affluentials reacted by adopting a

leisure lifestyle in the hope of augmenting their sense of coherence and meaning in life by becoming members in various social circles. Everyday life was thus embedded in a habitus of hedonism :

> I was feeling no satisfaction from my usual activities. We needed a new lease of life…Then we started to go for ballroom classes. We have made new friends. Now we have a social circle which we enjoy. We even travel abroad together. It is good to find new meanings". (Noel)

Noel's statement demonstrates how affluentials attempted to reduce their 'ontological (in)security' by experimenting with leisure activities. This functioned to alleviate their anxiety and put them in contact with other affluentials so as to build a network of friends that replaced their previous circle of freinds.

Despite their newly-found economic wealth, affluentials did not succeed in placing themselves within the middle class. As claimed by Goldthorpe (et al., 1971 : 163), "class and status relationships do not change entirely *pari passu* with changes in the economic, technological, and ecological infrastructure". Notwithstanding their advantageous levels of economic capital, affluentials' low levels of cultural and symbolic capital meant that their lifestyle made no impact on either their peers in different classes/factions or society in general. Affluentials were concerned with attaining greater security, and their consumer aspirations were more limited than older persons in the middle class. Moreover, they held high feeling of solidarity with manual workers and made no effort to befriend peers from the middle class. In short, their life was as proletarian and communal as that experienced by traditionalists and suburban blues, and did not possess any notions of the culture of reflexivity that characterises the lives of the middle class subjects.

**The culture of reflexivity : the middle class**

The middle class consisted of individuals whose life course revolved around their attempts to legitimate their composition of cultural capital. This relatively higher level of cultural capital imbued them with a culture of reflexivity whereby they interpreted the social environment in erudite

ways. This class included three class factions - namely, the ‘déclassé’, ‘new middle class’, and ‘old middle class’.

The middle-class subject put great emphasis on their levels of cultural capital. In contrast to the working-class lifestyle, where the good life was cast in terms of having an abundance of the things one likes and popularly understood as luxurious, the middle class valued the metaphysical aspects of life. Subjects orientated their consumption around objects that gave them intrinsic rather than extrinsic satisfaction. Although they were willing to engage in spending money for material acquisitions, this was only done so far as these purchases could be rationalised as being in line with their cultural aspirations. The middle-class inhabited a culture of reflexivity as they were always ready to explore persons’ roles and contributions to existing social, economic, political and moral ways of life. Interviews elicited an earnest pursuit to reflect on topics by contemplating matters like context, assumptions, cultural biases, and political influences. They accomplished this by stepping outside themselves and looking at the world around them like strangers. Subjects engaged in both personal and epistemological forms of reflexivity. They took the opportunity to reflect upon the ways in which persons’ values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider aims in life and social identities have contributed to contemporary Maltese and international social formations. Moreover, they were extremely interested as how people’s actions in the world may improve or worsen their lives, and hence, demonstrating a firm belief in the meritocratic attributes of Maltese society.

Subjects’ culture of reflexivity arose from three main factors. First, their relatively high levels of cultural capital which presented subjects with the ability to manipulate their ideas to their advantage. Members in this class held very high levels of both educational attainment and qualification, with the majority finishing secondary school and a significant number holding tertiary level qualifications. Moreover, many were trained in the right (polite) bodily dispositions and were knowledgeable as which items - ranging from wine products to computer hardware to fashion designs - are valuable and worthy. The fact that middle-class subjects chose to improve the levels of their cultural capital with a high degree of rigour also demonstrated dispositions of anxiety that arose from the fun-

damental ambiguity experienced by a class that wishes to escape identification with the working class but yet lacks the requisite resources to cultivate the lifestyle of the dominant class. This high level of cultural capital was crucial for the containment of the culture of reflexivity inhabited by the middle class since the quality of people's reflection depends on the breadth and depth of the knowledge they possess. Secondly, their relatively low level of economic capital which left them with no alternative but to emphasise their cultural capital in constructing their social and personal identity. In a level of frankness that exceeded my expectations, Iris claimed :

> "Looking back at my life I feel both proud and disillusioned. I am proud of my educational achievements and promotions at work. Yet, I am disillusioned that I did not make much money. In life money is as important as brains. Mind you, I will never utter such thoughts in public. It is best to blow one's own trumpet". (Iris)

Thirdly, subjects held high levels of 'emotional' and 'psychological' resources as most described how their parents devoted much time in sharpening the skills gained from formal education. Respondents recounted how both their fathers and mothers helped out with school work and even found time to attend 'parents-teachers' meetings at school (interestingly, a significant number of their mothers worked either full-time or part-time in the education sector as teachers). Middle-class members were in receipt of substantial levels of 'educational labour' and 'compensatory education' from their parents but especially mothers. Data showed how mothers of members in this class were successfully engaged in an extensive and systematic programme of generating cultural capital for their children whether it is was straightforward educational capital through tuition, or cultural capital through art, dance, drama and music classes. This has the positive effect of endowing subjects with high levels of emotional foundation as the quality of love and support they received from their parents provided them with higher-than-average levels of self-efficacy and self-esteem.

Married women in the middle class were not as firmly located in 'domesticity' as their working-class peers. A substantial number held re-

warding careers in teaching, nursing or in clerical work so that the division of labour in most households was organised in a more symmetrical manner. Middle-class women, similar to their working-class peers, also strove to present their house as 'modern'. However, this was not performed simply by purchasing low-priced items which hegemonical advertising defined as the essence of 'modernity', but by acquiring only those items which displayed a 'refined modernity' and 'professional femininity'. Thus, middle-class wives did not rush to buy the latest juice-blender or micro-oven which included - as a local advert promises - 'a million-and-one functions at even a cheaper price' but were more preoccupied for example as how they can have more sunlight in their living-room and whether the latest fuss about Jamie Oliver was reasonable. This is not the same as saying that middle-class women did not experience patriarchal subordination. Husbands and wider society never allowed them to prioritise their careers or other individual interests at the expense of either the running of the household or motherhood. In fact, one consistent feature of middle-class households was the role played by wives in either supporting their husbands' occupations or by holding long-term employment in clerical or lower professional jobs which enabled them to meet their domestic duties.

*Déclassé*

The déclassé were the dominated faction within the middle-class community. This status was chiefly the result of 'horizontal' downward mobility following the retirement transition. Most déclassé secured their middle-class position by doing exceptionally well at school so that they succeeded in entering either the civil service or Malta Drydocks (both very prestigious achievements in 1950s and 1960s Malta). As they also showed great aptitude for their work, they were promoted relatively early in their career. However, in the past three decades or so, their occupational career experienced various obstacles which depleted their levels of symbolic capital. During the Socialist era, they experienced much marginalisation as the government's policy was to promote only workers showing an enthusiasm for socialism rather than on the basis of meritocracy. The coming of post-industrialisation, the liberal market economy, and computerisation in post-1987 Malta also meant that much of their

'traditional bureaucratic' skills became obsolete. However, their chief problem in keeping hold of their symbolic capital was that their organisational skills became worthless in retirement. Knowledge held by bureaucrats is vested in the organisation so that once workers leave it they quickly lose their distinction.

Although the déclassé contained people from a variety of occupations all members in this class faction held regressive predispositions which manifested in a habitus of conformism. For instance, Victoria - a secondary teacher of French for about 30 years - greeted me with a firm handshake and invited me to the sitting room which also served as her study and contained various biographical books which I later found out was her favourite genre. She had opted for early retirement to take care of her ailing parents. She has no qualms about this turning point as in her life as later on her career years she stopped enjoying her profession due to an increasing lack of respect on behalf of the students and parents towards the teaching profession in general. "The whole world is going down the drains, and with no country being faster than Malta" she commented midway the interview. For Victoria, contemporary societies run in a topsy-turvy manner as they are characterised by an irresponsible families, unsound educational system, and flawed judicial systems : "Culture, with a capital C, is so scarce to find nowadays. It's how much money I have in my pocket, how flashy is my car, and the size of my latest tattoo which are important today". Victoria was exasperated by the fact that whilst in the past opportunities to take part in cultural activities were limited, if not inexistent, these times people are not interested :

> "On Saturdays the public library, which contains hundreds of book titles following various public-private investments in recent years, is almost empty. I remember some two decades ago there used to be a queue of parents with their children in tow outside its door as much as fifteen minutes before it opened. The recent affluence was more of a detriment to the development of western society than a beneficial thing" (Victoria)

Members' habitus of conformism was particularly visible in their rejection of every sign of departure from the old order as they also expressed

the most austere and traditional values. This taste for conformism culminated in a regressive personality that influenced the déclassé to react strongly against all inclinations towards modernism which they interpreted as a sign of moral decadence and excess. Convinced that they owe their position to a 'simple' and 'honest' life, the déclassé expressed a continuous expression of resentment towards the 'new' lax morality of contemporary industrial societies. In that the déclassé shunned any upcoming form of consumption which signalled a deviation from a 'serious' life, it was clear that their habitus had some parallelism with that of the traditionalists. However, to overlap the two together is mistaken since the déclassé actually militated only against those 'avant-garde' trends rather than 'modern' leanings as such. For the déclassé, the only true and valid form of 'modernism' was that which held a customary middle-brow character in which they were expert in and which sealed their successful positioning in the middle-class space during adulthood.

*'New' middle class*

Jacob greeted me with a warm smile, shook my hands firmly, and led me into his study which contained an impressive mahogany desk cluttered with various newspaper and periodical cuttings, and three solid bookcases. Each was dedicated to a particular area of interest : Melitensia volumes, academic publications, and classic and contemporary works of fiction. Our first ten minutes was dedicated to the subject of elder abuse since Jacob was at that time researching the extent that accidents in later life - such as falling down the stairs and overdosing on pills - were not calamities at all but direct efforts by older persons to end their lives. He had already drafted a report to present to the government and various NGOs. Jacob considered this work both a leisure interest and a moral responsibility. Jacob was also highly knowledgeable about football and followed his favourite teams - Italy, Juventus, and Valletta - very passionately. He was also a big fan of the Beatles and Rolling Stones, and held an extensive collection of vinyl and compact discs on 1960s music. Another remarkable aspect of Jacob's life was his high levels of attention towards his body. He follows a low-fat diet, an exercise plan which he found on a website on 'successful ageing', and makes sure that he always looked his best by having a daily shaving routine, regular haircuts,

buying the right shampoo and skin-care products, and dressing casually but smart.

The 'new' middle-class [NMC] held an intermediate position between the déclassé and 'old' middle class factions. The basic characteristic of this class faction was members' knowledge in both low- and high-brow forms of cultural capital. The NMC shunned an unreserved admiration for 'profane' and 'sacred' forms of cultural capital in favour of a more 'omnivorous' approach. Close to the 'cultural omnivore' thesis (Emmison, 2003), the NMC appreciated various kinds of socio-cultural activities ranging from opera music to country music, from fencing to snooker, from classic authors such as Nikolai Gogol to more current ones such as Danielle Steele, and from classic films such as *Ben Hur* to more commercial ones such as *Titanic*. This 'omnivorous' attitude towards culture enabled the NMC to experience a smooth transition from a life in full-time employment and family care to a third age lifestyle. The NMC channelled their newly found freedom into the creative exploration of meaningful activity within the structural limits set by later life. Members in this class faction were the local pioneers of Gilleard and Higgs' third age revolution :

> The complex mix - of rising income, increased personal freedom and increased material wealth, of changing patterns of work, expanding opportunities for consumption coupled with an increase sense of 'risk' or 'personal insecurity' - marks a distinct period in western countries. It amounts to a cultural revolution that has begun to transform the nature if ageing...
>
> Gilleard and Higgs, 2002 : 379

The NMC thus experienced a 'horizontal' upward trajectory within the middle-class position following their transition to retirement. As 'older tourists' - to paraphrase Bauman (1998) - it was the NMC who were the most successful in ageing 'successfully' and 'actively'. Their lives were characterised by a habitus of post-materialism. As the NMC's pension income was adequate enough to satisfy more than basic requirements, their focus and concerns shifted on to the realm nonmaterial goods. Rather than placing strong priorities on material and safety needs such as

a strong national defense and 'law and order', NMCs gave high priority to values such as individual improvement, personal freedom, citizen input in government decisions, and the ideal of a society based on humanism that includes a clean and healthy environment. Indeed, the NMC showed little interest in material issues such as pensions, economic inflation, illegal migration, and welfare services but were then concerned with post-materialist issues such as the environment, democracy, xenophobia, freedom of speech, and drug abuse :

> "Malta disappoints me because political parties disagree and fight over petty issues. Is it really a problem that public transport's tickets increased by some cents? I am more preoccupied by the increasing racist remarks one hears on [local] television. And what about the environment and the increasing drug abuse?" (Nina)

NMC's taste for post-materialism was also evident from their fascination for anything exotic which arose most clearly with respect to their interests in travel and food. Whilst NMC expressed an interest to visit European countries such as Croatia, Estonia, Slovakia, and Bulgaria (which differed from the usual preferences of Lourdes, London, and Rome), it was interesting that during interviews they presented a good selection of various fruit-teas and rich coffees together with homemade pies and tarts. Indeed, the NMC stood up in great contrast with peers, the 'old' middle class, who have the access to the most prestigious activities, far from vulgar crowds, as expressed in yachting, open-sea swimming, cross-country skiing or underwater fishing.

*'Old' middle class*

The 'old' middle-class [OMC] constituted the dominant faction. Generally, members in this class faction consisted of subjects who followed their parents in either entering the 'traditional' professional classes or in managing small but well-established family businesses. This meant that this faction was the most successful in transforming cultural capital into economic capital, and that subjects held very stable class trajectories which imbued them with strong levels of symbolic capital. Oliver

owned, together with his brother, a jewellery shop in one of the oldest cities of Malta where he also resided. It was opened by his great-grandfather in the mid-nineteenth century and was passed down by from one generation to another. As a consequence of the family business, Oliver was well-known to the local community and throughout his life followed in his fathers' footsteps and served as a patron to many an association ranging from the band club to the local Nationalist Party committee to the city football club. Aware that in a couple of years time his children will be taking his place at the family business, a transition which will also function to increase their status in the community, Oliver was sure that they will be equally successful in making a name for the family. Oliver believed that success only results following hard work, sacrifices, and a strict adherence to Christian values. Subjects in the OMC held strong levels of self-esteem and self-assurance as a by-product of their secure position at the apex of the middle class, and held strong alliances with the dominant class. Typical members in the OMC were treated as unofficial community leaders, and thereby, held some role in various local committees and boards of interest. Indeed, it is common knowledge in Malta that no mayor would proceed with some project until s/he has consulted with the older members of the local OMC. This attention generated amongst them an appreciation of serving as some kind of role model :

> "My family has always been very active in this locality…I am very attentive to my manners and actions when I go out. I am also always careful not to associate myself with others who may reflect badly on my behalf. I am not a snob. Will the people treat me seriously if I act inappropriately?" (Rita)

This awareness of being in the 'public eye' engendered amongst the OMC a habitus of conscientiousness. In contrast to other middle-class factions, they did not consider cultural sophistication as the real founding of developed societies. More central to them were the moral qualities of honesty, respect for others, charity, and sincerity. Similar to Lamont's (1992 : xxvi) middle class respondents, the OMC "were very critical of individuals who put the improvement of their social position above hu-

man and moral considerations". Subjects were careful not to put their public persona on a short footing since they knew that their symbolic capital was not strong enough enough to exonerate them, and therefore, followed society's norms and associations' regulations very carefully. In practice, their habitus emerged as a taste for punctilious behaviour and was visible in three key ways, namely : their attention to detail, strong levels of self-discipline, and a rigorous and perfectionist character. The OMC had immense driving energy to deal with challenges coming their way, showed meticulous attention to every detail, and held a deep commitment to conclude one's obligations irrespective of their busy work schedule. The OMC also constituted the most active devotees of highbrow culture as they perceived it to be intimately related to, and even the reason, for their dominant position in the middle class. Contrary to both the déclassé and the NMCs, the OMCs held luxury tastes as they amassed the most expensive and most prestigious activities, reading expensive glossy magazines, visiting antique dealers, galleries and concern halls, as well as owning pianos, works of art, and the latest movie camrecorders.

The common assumption that the middle-class occupies an ambiguous zone of social and political space is inexact. Rather, one found the middle-class space to be demarcated in well-formed boundaries as subjects' culture of reflexivity and habitus contrasted well with working-class culture of necessity on one hand and the culture of elitism as professed by the dominant class on the other. Despite the different class factions comprising the middle class, all subjects valued independence, career and respectability which were generally pursued through hard work, and most importantly, through a reflexive lifestyle.

**The culture of elitism : the dominant class**

The 'dominant' class consisted of subjects with 'very high' levels of social capital and 'high' levels of cultural or economic capital. This combination endowed them with record levels of symbolic capital. This class included two factions, 'wealthy metropolitans' and 'professional careerists', both located within a culture of elitism which endowed them with a habitus of exclusivity.

At first André was unsure whether to participate as an interviewee but as we struck a conversation about the government's views on pensions he became more trustful, and eventually, set me up an appointment to meet in four weeks time. André's days, it turned out, were choc-a-bloc with appointments and meetings. He was also writing a memoir of his career. On the day of the interview it took me more than 30 minutes to locate André's converted farmhouse as it was situated deep in the country. He opened his drive-in gate so that I could put my car in a small but effective private-car park. André greeted me affectively in a *Nino Cerruti*'s polo-shirt and a *Lacoste* shorts which made me feel shabby in my 'ordinary' clothes. He hired a gardener to tend to the garden and had a female helper coming to do the cleaning twice a week. André, a lawyer by profession, held a very successful career in the civil service. As a result, he had a distinctive opinion of himself :

> "I look back on my life with pride. Very few achieved more than me in the civil service. I was not lucky at all, if you ask me. I succeeded as a result of my efforts and intuitive judgements. I worked hard and spent many a weekend holed up in my office". (André)

Subjects in the dominant class were born in relatively affluent families so that their childhood was at opposite ends from a taste for necessity. Typical houses of members in this class had three bedrooms, big garage, two to three bathrooms, spacious yards, and a swimming pool. Recreation and leisure patterns revolved around exclusive activities such as collecting jazz records, eating at fashionable restaurants, going for weekend breaks in a range of European capital cities, playing golf, and joining restricted sports clubs. They also drove high-status vehicles ranging from Mercedes to BMW to Volkswagen. Most subjects' secondary education was spent at St. Edwards' College, a private school which to this very day is still renowned for prioritising personality development over academic accreditation. The common experience of children from upper-class homes, with fathers in business and professional jobs, is of a fairly smooth progress through school, and hence, a fairly open access to good jobs together with lost of personal encouragement to climb the career ladder. Their experience of familial socialisation encouraged them to

adopt a leadership and extrovert role. They were brought up in families where parents used various strategies to instil in children above-average levels of self-assurance and -confidence. Subjects were also heavily monitored for any traits of timidity and insecurity, with such personal characteristics being heavily discouraged through both positive and negative reinforcements. Parents used diverse tactics to instil in their children an assertive personality :

> "Each one of us [siblings] had a room of his or her own and my mother wanted us to instruct the house-maid ourselves regarding the manner that we wanted it to be tidied…I never thought I was being bossy or arrogant. It was her job. My mother gave her money." (Carol)

Subjects were strongly affiliated within various organisations which operated on a closed membership policy which meant that new members must be 'put up' for sponsorship by existing members, go through a rigorous process in which they are voted on by a committee, and if successful, be formally invited to join the group. Many also conducted volunteer work in invitational organisations, rather than those organisations that are open to everyone who wishes to join, a pattern which reflected underlying class-based criteria for involvement in organisations. Class-appropriate behaviour was also visible in the activities that members in this class participated in, such as serving as a trustee on a non-profit charity gala but never spending time as a hands-on volunteer in direct contact with the 'less fortunate'. Subjects also held important roles within such associations so that they were influential in both their everyday and long-term planning. Class and status honour comes not only from maintaining a similarity with those who are similar, but also from maintaining an acceptable social distance from those who are different. As to be expected, their memberships and important roles within both popular and elite organisations regaled them with strong levels of bridging social capital. Membership in identifiably elite associations could be considered as a valid indicator of upper-class social networks. Such experiences meant that dominant-class subjects were embodied in a culture of elitism which endowed them with a habitus of exclusivity. Although members did not discuss their everyday actions in class terms they were

unequivocal about their desire to hold social interaction only with people within their social circle. They recounted various instances throughout their lives when they chose to change house location, leisure pursuits, and club membership so as to interact closer with others who are our 'type'. This pursuit for privilege and exclusivity was apparent in their sponsoring of the 'debutante presentation' of their grandchildren through 'invitation-only' parties. As the invitation included many peers in their same class whom they wanted to impress, and others to whom they wanted to communicate their superiority, no expense was spared in organisation. This was very evident from the family photographs captured in these events which subjects displayed on their mantelpieces. This practice had the obvious objective of establishing their family's reputation as part of the dominant class since it provided evidence vis-à-vis their volumes of social capital (the ability to have the guest-list), economic capital (the ability to pay the costs of the festivity), and cultural capital (refinement, good manners and taste displayed at the event). Since the older subject is credited as a major sponsor, this ritual functioned to enhance his/her elite status in the eyes of the Maltese community. Subjects in this class also chose their friends carefully, showing a preference for individuals owning high levels of class capital. When subjects mentioned relatives, friends, or acquaintances, they always informed me of their social position.

In contrast to peers in more powerless class positions, wives in the dominant class held a high share of individual power. Wives mentioned how they had individual bank accounts in which they held both personal wealth as well as regular deposits by their husbands. In this respect, they had the power to purchase objects and services without seeking the approval of husbands. Clubs provided these women with a link with people of similar backgrounds and traditions, as well as important 'bridging' networks and associational patterns. Yet, dominant-class wives - similar to peers in lower classes - also expressed dissatisfaction with their domestic role as they held an unequal voice in major family decisions, sole responsibility for home and family, and no alternative but to support the public position of their husbands who were perceived to be the principal foundation underlying the family's dominant class position. Rather than seeking to increase their family's volumes of class capital by seeking clerical employment or opting for a professional career as their middle-

class peers do, their role consisted in assuming an accommodative and supportive function so that their husbands become free to devote their whole energies to managing their economic and political responsibilities. Despite being free of mundane household chores, they still felt taken-for-granted and part of a stable and unquestionable reality.

Life-history interviews located two class factions within the dominant class, wealthy metropolitans and professional careerists. The following subsection provides brief overviews of their exact position together with their specific class trajectories.

*Wealthy Metropolitans and Professional Careerists*

In *Distinction* Bourdieu (1984) reported two main variants of the dominant class in French society : a dominant class faction made up of subjects with excessive holding of economic capital but average volumes of cultural capital, and a dominated class faction holding opposite patterns of class capital. Data also located two similar factions, termed as 'wealthy metropolitans' and 'professional careerists' respectively. Generally speaking, whilst the former consisted of individuals owning relatively large companies which employed more than 10 employees and had a relatively large turnover, the latter (such as André) held a comprehensive career within the civil service during which they reached the topmost occupational positions. Yet, in contrast to Bourdieu's conclusions these two class factions occupied reverse positions in the class hierarchy. It was the 'professional careerists' who were located in the dominant class. As wealthy metropolitans got older their leadership positions in business enterprises were increasingly challenged, and eventually, relinquished to their children. Reasons included the fact that their wives who were tired of providing a accommodative role and also empathised with their children's drive for further decision-making power, as well as the presence of ageism which convinced both children and employees that persons in their seventh/eight decade cannot possibly direct an economic enterprise in a satisfactory manner. Such incidents made wealthy metropolitans experience grave status inconsistencies which functioned to diminish their levels of symbolic capital. The opposite was the case with respect to professional careerists whose advancing age did not induce them to experience any status inconsistency but, on the con-

trary, rendered their cultural assets more coveted. Professional careerists did not retire on their 61st birthday as they were generally reemployed as 'government consultants' - an occupational category which does not fall under the *Retirement Act*. Whilst their wives did not encourage them to stop working since professional careerists made no special demands on them, the association between ageing and wisdom meant that their possible contribution was considered even more valuable than that offered by younger peers. Professional careerists were busily engaged in writing newspaper articles, representing the government as national experts both locally and in Brussels, and on a lighter note, trying to attend all the high-level cocktail parties that they were invited to. They were also frequent guests on television discussion programmes which increased their volumes of symbolic capital as they were witnessed by the general public. The real accomplishment of professional careerists was their success in increasing the value of their cultural resources once they reached later life. The combination of their retirement and their higher-than-average levels of cultural capital on one hand, and the transition of Maltese society from an industrial to a post-industrial state on the other, meant that they were at the right place at the right time.

The dominant position held by the elite class was largely due to their success in translating their volume and specific composition of social capital into strong levels of symbolic power. More than the 'old' middle class, subjects had the ability to make their power appear as natural, inevitable, and thus apolitical, rather than as the product of historical struggle, economic exploitation, and human deceit. This functioned to mask their lifelong participation in class relations so that 'others' recognised and accepted their power as fair and justified.

# 5

## PERSONIFYING BOUNDARIES : CLASS IMAGERY AND IDENTIFICATION

### Models of class imagery

Subjects' images of the class system consisted of either a three- or four-tiered system of inequality. Data also revealed key differences as to how classes view the class system. Whilst the traditionalist class faction and the middle class perceived the class system from a 'status hierarchy' outlook, the dominant class and working-class factions adopted a 'power' model perspective. The mere mentioning of class caused subjects to experience a certain level of anxiety as they equated it with issues of status whereby people are looked down upon and considered inferior. Subjects were initially reluctant to talk about such a negative topic and attempted to distance themselves from class by downplaying its relevance to their lives. When people describe their unequal worlds, they are often engaged in making claims about the relevant worth of different groups and the fairness (or otherwise) of social arrangements. This was an expected reaction considering the moral baggage surrounding class relations. It was only after a trustful relationship had been established that subjects acknowledged Malta as a 'class society'. Their anxiety decreased even further as I sought to examine class 'where it actually lives' rather than 'class positioning' as such. Although what subjects had to say about class turned out to be a highly personal composition that was rarely consistent or well-formulated, they declined that the elimination of absolute poverty and increasing trends in consumption had led to the abolition of class inequality.

Data located two different imageries of the class system. Whilst the working class perceived the class structure as a three-tiered system, the middle and dominant classes held a four-tiered image. These excerpts are very illustrative of this division (respectively) :

> "I would say that there are three classes in all. There are the 'rich' who are very powerful, lead comfortable lives and are also well-connected. The 'middle class' is made up of average people. They always work hard and never had a 'free lunch'. Finally, at the bottom of the class system one finds a 'lower class' such as the unemployed, drug-addicts, single-mothers, and others on welfare." (Timothy - working class).

> "The very rich would be at the top. The middle class who live comfortable lives as the result of high-income, good education levels, and safe/cushy occupations would be next. The working class then is made up of workers with low levels of education, and thus, easily manipulated by politicians …Finally the lower class is made up of poor individuals who are highly dependent on welfare." (Ramon - middle class)

Such divergence arose because whilst the working-class elders put all respectable pensioners in one middle-class grouping that included 'lower', 'middle', and 'upper' subdivisions, the middle and dominant classes insisted on a distinction between subjects with low and high volumes of cultural capital. On one hand, the working class perceived the class system to include a predominant 'middle-class' grouping of 'respectable' workers irrespective of differences in economic and cultural capital. They deemed all 'honest' and 'industrious' workers to be located in the middle sector of the class hierarchy. Whilst subjects acknowledged that there are important differences between themselves and more educated/affluent workers, they claimed that there were no intrinsic contrasts since - in Ingrid's words - "we are all Maltese and common mortals at the end of the day". On the other hand, the middle and dominant classes perceived subjects with either a history in manual work, an involvement in working-class movements, or holding low levels of cultural capital to be located in a distinct and lower class position to themselves. This emerged clearly in the wish for their children to marry within their class :

> "I was very unhappy with my daughter's first boyfriend. He was a very honest man but had no qualifications and his family was very active in the General Workers' Union. Their opinions were too radical for my tastes. I do not look down on such people but I had higher aspirations for her…he was not going to bring anything to the marriage. He was not very educated, his occupation unsteady, and had no real savings. I did not want my daughter to relegate herself." (Agatha)

Divergent imageries of the class system can be traced to issues of class formation throughout subjects' adulthood during the Socialist era when working-class movements attempted to usurp the privileges held by families in upper- class strata. Whilst the class imagery of the working class followed their aspiration for class mobility, the upholding of a distinction between the 'working' and 'middle' classes resulted from their interest to maintain class distinction. Yet, these imageries were also the result of subjects' interpretation of retirement. Working-class members perceived such a passage as encouraging the levelling of social statutes now that all retirees hold a similar relationship to the means of production. Although subjects in this class acknowledged the continuance of material inequality amongst older persons they also believed that later life is characterised by higher levels of *communitas*. The middle and dominant classes, in contrast, were keen to maintain their social statuses and distinction despite retirement. Anxious not to let retirement instil a downwardly trajectory into their class careers, subjects manipulated much of their everyday experience - including their image of the class system - to communicate and maintain their social distinction. If one asks 'who benefits from such imageries of the class system?' one finds that such representations always go hand-in-hand with the interests of actors. Hence, whilst the three-tiered image held by the working-class factions served their wish to elevate their position further into the middle-class space, the four-tiered image held by middle and dominant classes backed up their efforts to distance themselves from 'other' peers.

Interviews also revealed two opposing analytical models that subjects utilised to make sense of the unequal worlds they inhabited. Whilst the traditionalist faction and the middle class perceived the class system

from a ‘status hierarchy’ outlook, the remaining working class factions and the dominant class adopted a ‘power’ model type of imagery. Class, according to traditionalists and the middle class, operated in a gradational manner as their standard image of the class system was of rungs on a ladder where each is slightly better-off and more powerful than the one below it. Far from acknowledging the major divisions and antagonisms characterising different classes, traditionalists and middle-class subjects related to class according to the rule of functional interdependence as if all classes contributed cordially to the whole social system. Thus, their class imagery was akin to people’s experience of class in pre-enlightenment times where inequality was not thought to result from either conflict or contestations for scarce resources but as divinely ordained. In other words, they stressed the need and purposes of hierarchy, deference, class differentiation, and inequality in general :

> “I was never was jealous of more powerful people. I believe that everyone is the same in God’s eyes. Who am I to change the world? I say that we need different people with different skills. If everyone was rich or intelligent then who will bake our bread or farm our lands.” (Louis)

The determinants of the ‘status hierarchy’ model amongst traditionalists resulted from their cultural habitus. Past experiences in their work and community situations meant that throughout their adulthood subjects were in direct association with successful professionals, politicians, and entrepreneurs. This functioned to hinder them from becoming loyal to class peers or develop any social antagonism towards subjects in other classes with opposing interests. Initially, it was difficult to make sense why the middle class - considering their earnest in making a distinction between themselves and others holding lower levels of cultural capital - held a ‘status hierarchy’ model. This was actually due to their constant contrast of present times with past life during the Socialist era. During interviews middle-class subjects emphasised constantly the withering of the antagonistic character of class relations following the coming of liberal-market politics. It was in this sense that subjects perceived the present tranquil state of class politics as compatible with a ‘status hierarchy’ model. Suburban blues and affluentials, as well as the dominant class

factions, adopted a 'power model' imagery of the class system that incorporated an 'us and them' standpoint. In taking such a position, subjects embraced two key assumptions. First, diverse classes are in competition for key resources so that it is in their interest to draw positive evaluations about 'themselves' and 'others' respectively. Secondly, that it is valuable and normal to make a case about the injustices of their own social situation. Indeed, subjects deploying 'us and them' attitudes were very emotional about class. They were not only aware of the mechanisms that generated class inequalities but also deemed the 'class system' to be the primary cause of inequality and unfairness. Suburban blues and affluentials utilised 'us' to refer to the honourable, hard-working common people, exploited by the fraudulent 'them'. The latter term was also used to refer to subjects in the lower class - that is, individuals lacking both 'shame' or 'honour' such as criminals, single mothers, long-term unemployed, and drug addicts - whom they perceived to be living off their hard-earned taxes. They perceived their position as 'sandwiched' between two oppressive classes:

> "The lower classes make a mess of their lives but then are in receipt of various welfare benefits paid directly from my taxes. On the other hand, old people who are much richer than me are entitled to almost the same welfare services as myself since the government means-tests only our income rather than our assets". (Noel)

The dominant class viewed 'us' as industrious and diligent persons who valued competence, work-ethic virtues (such as competitiveness, dynamism, self-direction, resilience, and long-term planning), and who were involved in religious and volunteering organisations. 'Them', on the other hand, was utilised to refer to trouble-rousing and vulgar workers who squandered their money in cigarettes, alcohol and lotto. Again, the determinants of the 'power' model amongst the working and dominant classes can be easily found in their respective life course and class trajectories. Industrial and organisational cultures demarcate a collar divide as they engender perceptions of class as oppositional; thus, weaving a determination to symbolically mark off manual from non-manual work and to emphasise the distance between the two forms of employment. Subur-

ban blues and affluentials held much experience in traditional working-class cultures so that their habitus was deeply marked by antagonistic feelings towards both 'exploiters' and 'free-riders'. Dominant-class subjects, in contrast, were conscious that their material feats, social prestige and symbolic power were threatened by individuals and groups with low moral standards and character who valued egoism in favour of altruism.

It is noteworthy that subjects' images of the class system were not always clear-cut and tended to slip easily from one model to another. Whilst the distinctions of 'us and them' were easily converted by subjects in the working and dominant classes into chains of command by talking about the 'lower', 'middle' and 'upper classes', middle-class subjects often collapsed the gradations of hierarchy into three or two antagonistic groups or sub-dividing the categories of group models to then form a hierarchy. The latter was especially true with respect to the 'déclassé' who tended to switch to the 'power model' outlook when directing their attention to individuals with lower and higher levels of cultural and economic capital respectively such as the affluentials. Yet, these patterns should not be taken as backing the increasing irrelevance of class since historians of social imagery argue that the language of social description have always been increasingly fluid and ambiguous.

**The individualisation of class consciousness**

Data analysis revealed that processes of hierarchical differentiation rarely gave rise to either collectivised 'class' or explicit 'class' identities amongst older persons. Older cohorts do not constitute an exception towards the increasing documentation supporting the individualisation of class identities. When subjects were asked in which class position they perceived themselves, all replied that they generally saw themselves as being part of the 'middling sort' - that is, honest, hard-working, sober, industrious, thrifty persons in contrast to a selfish, arrogant, dishonest and decadent upper class on one hand, and an undisciplined, debauched, and ignoble lower class on the other. This preference towards a middle-class subjective position - irrespective of class - occurred due to the phenomenon of 'reference-group forces' whereby individuals evaluate "their class location in light of the distribution of education, occupation, authority, and income around persons around them" (Evans et al., 1992 :

465). The fact that the working class held a subjective middle-class identification was unforeseen considering their particular cultures and habitus. Yet, further analysis of data revealed that such a finding was valid because 'reference-group forces' were also sensitive to a historical framework. After all, "neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both" (Mills, 1959 : 3). In later life, class-based judgements do not occur solely with respect to contemporary situations but were also related to past life events. The working class held a 'middle class' identity because they compared their present quality of life to that experienced in preceding phases of the life course. They felt that they had more than enough money for their everyday needs and the occasional luxury when compared to the initial post-war decades. World War II (1939-1945) was surely a significant 'event', 'turning point', and 'reference point' for current older persons. In contrast to what happened in the first war, soldiers were not sent to fight in appalling conditions whilst the local populations carried on living in a relatively comfortable manner. Malta experienced intense and continuous air raids during the war. The worst part occurred in the first quarter of 1942 which witnessed 154 days of continuous raids (London had 57) and 6,700 tons of dropped bombs (Coventry's worst night of destruction was 260 tons). Moreover, working-class elders emphasised how they could now afford more consumer utilities (ranging from cable television to washing machines to mobile phones) when compared to their midlife years.

Interviews also investigated subjects' awareness with respect to 'class opposition' and 'class totality', and whether they yearned for an 'alternative society'. Both suburban blues and affluentials were conscious of other individuals having opposing class interests and of the pervasiveness of class relations in everyday life. They perceived the greatest threat to their quality of life as coming from 'upper' class individuals whose comfortable levels of economic capital protected them from inflation and the downsizing of the welfare state. They also interpreted their lives from a classed lens so that they always blamed the state and strong capitalist companies as the major causes underlying their failure to improve their class position. The fact that such perceptions were held even by affluentials demonstrates the power of the habitus as a psychological force. Just as much as adult monolingual speakers of Maltese have diffi-

culty picking up a second language without displaying an accent, affluentials find it difficult not to think and act 'within' a culture of necessity. However, such feelings amongst the suburban blues and affluentials did not result - to paraphrase Marx - in an 'explosion of consciousness'. Suburban blues and affluentials made use of consumption to strengthen their sense of purpose and identity in the hope of moving closer to the middle class. This was even true of the few members in the suburban-blues class faction who helped the Malta Labour Party in organising mass demonstrations and protests, and signed most petitions supporting any radical issue but especially worker-related concerns. Consumer products, the advertisements for them, and their representations in numerous television programmes and movies, tap into unconscious desires and help to justify the presence of capitalism. The alienation of the citizens in everyday through the process of consumption has become a global and international phenomenon. Consumption nowadays can be equated to an active ideology positing that the meaning of life is to be found in buying things and pre-packaged experiences, and accessing mundane and repetitive services and understandings.

The traditionalist class faction, and the middle class factions, held a weak awareness of 'class opposition' and 'class totality', and no aspiration for an 'alternative society'. Subjects in these classes perceived class differences to have decreased in recent decades, and despite holding class conflict as inevitable, claimed that class differences are not insurmountable. Contrary to Moore's (1975) findings, religion does influence people's levels of class consciousness. The religious attitudes held by traditionalists influenced them to accept their subjugated position and the overall class hierarchy as 'natural' so that they were unconcerned to unite with others for improved conditions. Subjects in the middle and dominant classes followed a third age lifestyle so that they were unperturbed by the presence of 'others' holding opposite class interests and unaware of the effect of class on their lives. As they resorted to hobbies, voluntary work, and part-time work to construct more meaningful lives in view of the retirement transition, they experienced class inequalities in a less absolute manner when compared to peers in the suburban blues and affluentials class factions. Perceiving their everyday life as 'comfortable', they resisted any departure from the existing social system. It was only when the interview touched upon their politi-

cal attitudes that subjects showed the strongest levels of 'class opposition' and 'class totality'. As Devine (1992) maintained, it is when people talk of political conflict that they emphasise most strongly competing forms of class *ethos*. For instance, whilst traditionalists spoke of how their interests were being upset by middle-class subjects due to the increasing prevalence of liberal values, the middle class lamented how other classes' obsession with materialism was the chief cause underlying Malta's problems. The déclassé were very vociferous and spoke unsympathetically of the *nouveaux riches* whom they held responsible for Malta's socio-economic difficulties. The dominant class also had harsh words regarding the working class and those sectors within the middle class whose conservative attitudes made Malta's entry in the European Union problematic.

In line with the 'culturalist' path in class research the class identity of average older persons in Malta has transformed itself into an 'individualist' phenomenon. Although subjects saw themselves as members of a class grouping they refrained from evoking a sense of collectivity. With the exception of some members of the suburban-blues faction, subjects could not articulate the meaning underlying their subjective class identification, and thus, displayed a high degree of class 'uncertainty'.

**The politics of dis-identification : How 'we' are not like 'them'!**

The preference of subjects to approach their class position in an individualist, rather than collectivist, manner meant that class identities were rarely articulated in an explicit manner. In locating the patterns of class identification in later life, it resulted that "rather than evoking a sense of *belonging* to a collective group, [class identification] invokes a sense of *differentiation* from others" (Savage, 2000 : 115 - italics in original). Although class was central to older subjects' subjectivities it was not spoken of in the traditional sense of recognition such as "I am in 'that' or 'that' class". Rather, it was "displayed in their multitudinous efforts not to be recognised as a member of [some undesirable] class" (Skeggs, 1997 : 74). In other words, class identities were constructed by subjects emphasising how the social worlds they inhabited lacked those imperfections that characterise the lives of 'other' classes. Traditionalists strove to distinguish themselves as a class of honourable and industrious indi-

viduals by highlighting how they were neither untrustworthy, a disgrace to their family, lazy, or unkempt. Aware of their low levels of class resources, traditionalists found that they had no other alternative than to mark their class space with traditional qualities - most notably, *ghaqal* (prudence) and *bzulija* (diligence). This was performed, however, not by stressing how these qualities are intrinsic to their daily lives but by emphasising how other classes and class factions lacked such values. Since competition for scarce resources occurred mostly vis-à-vis suburban blues and affluentials, it was not surprising that traditionalists were keen to distance themselves and pour scorn on members in other working class factions. Sexual modesty was another defining characteristic of traditionalists. They went to great pains to highlight how - unlike what happens amongst members in 'other' classes - nobody in their nuclear family married outside the church, engaged in cohabitation, had children out of wedlock, or experienced separation or divorce. Subjects were quick to point out that they valued a life that combined a routine approach to work, a traditional perspective on family affairs, and a marked observance towards the Catholic Church. As they displayed hostile feelings towards those perceived to be antagonistic towards tradition, members in this class faction also dis-identified themselves from the 'new' middle class :

> "People around here do not applaud every new idea so that some time later they ditch it in favour of some newer trend. Despite that grocers are full of imported food, I have been buying chickens and rabbits from the same farm for the past 30 years. People around here do not put airs by giving the impression that they are more English than Maltese." (Ingrid)

Suburban blues and affluentials emphasised their class-related credentials by highlighting their 'respectability'. This was done by emphasising the "indecency" and "backwardness" of the traditionalist class faction on one hand, and the "snobbishness" and "pretentiousness" of the middle and dominant classes on the other. These two class factions displayed significant antipathy towards persons harbouring traditional and conservative values which they perceived to be the main causes underlying so-

cial inequality in Malta. Suburban blues and affluentials strove hard to disassociate themselves from those perceived to "have a lot of airs". They engaged in careful monitoring for pretensions and often checked self-importance amongst fellow members through long-standing clichés such as "too big for your boots", "full of graces", and "stepping out of line". Being 'respectable', therefore, meant holding a *bona fide* character rather than acting like a *primadonna*. Suburban blues and affluentials thus extolled their 'material' taste in which pragmatic solutions are offered to both simple and complex problems. In essence, this had the function of demeaning the value of the 'formal aesthetic' that is so characteristic of the middle class and which treats in the environment as an opportunity to display one's cultural sensibilities.

The middle class strove hard to identify themselves as the bearers of the 'correct' and 'legitimate' forms of cultural capital. Subjects stressed the 'crude', 'task-oriented' and 'unqualified' qualities of the upper classes and the 'big money but small brains' syndrome of the middle class. Contrary to Savage's (et al., 2001) findings, middle-class subjects projecting themselves as 'ordinary'. Rather, they constructed meticulous patterns of dis-identifications to project themselves as 'culturally refined'. The attempts by Jenny to differentiate herself from her "helper" (maid) was very indicative of this pattern:

> "Nowadays everybody seems to be in the same class. My sister's gardener sends his son to a private school. My helper is very nice too. Yet, if you look twice at these people you will notice various differences. My helper finds it difficult to express herself. When she switches to English she makes a lot of grammatical mistakes such as 'I has' and mispronounces words. For example, during the World Cup my nephew used to laugh at her because she used to say 'penalteries' instead of 'penalties'. Her level of education is not very good". (Jenny)

Middle-class members perceived the 'body', more than their educational levels of attainment or qualification, as the most potent carrier of class signals. Subjects dis-identified themselves from 'others' in lower and higher classes in three 'physical' ways. First, they distanced themselves

from peers holding 'rough' and 'rudimentary' manners as displayed both in embodied (e.g. body shape, gait, and posture) and objectified (e.g. tattoos, body piercing and body jewellery) qualities. Secondly, subjects viewed physical ill-health - ranging from lung cancer to obesity to gout - as the 'pathologized' signs of working- and upper-class excess. Finally, they expressed dislike towards older persons who dressed inappropriately to a third age lifestyle - that is, either by donning attire fit only for 'younger' individuals or wearing outmoded clothing. Appearance, for the middle class, was far from holding a purely functional basis but was utilised as a display of distinction and site for investment.

The dominant class ascertained its elite identity in the class hierarchy by demeaning the 'laziness' and 'ignorance' of the lower class, the 'brusqueness' and 'pig-headedness' of the manual class, and the 'dilettantism' and 'romanticism' of the middle class. Subjects looked down on the lower classes in a patronising manner as they blamed them for creating the culture of poverty they inhabited through their own irresponsible behaviour. They also held antagonistic feelings towards workers and supporters of working-class movements as they considered them to be capable of calculated maliciousness. The feeling arose from the fact that both wealthy metropolitans and professional careerists experienced much frustration and both physical and symbolic violence during the socialist era. However, not even the middle class was spared as dominant class subjects mocked its sentimentalist character, its deferential relationship to both Church and government, and excessive rationalisations :

> "Individuals with an illustrious educational career make me laugh. All those years invested in obtaining so many certificates and degrees to end up working in the civil service. What I mean is this : what is the value of such diplomas if one is nothing but a yes-man [sic]" (Henry)

Dis-identification was strongest on the behalf of déclassé and OMC. This occurred as both experienced their position in the class space to be increasingly threatened by the recent upward mobility experienced by affluentials and 'new' middle class (respectively). Aware that their traditional privileges were increasingly overshadowed by the spending power of affluentials, the déclassé denounced Malta as a "jungle of opportun-

ism" where "wealthy but ignorant people have their own way" (Melanie). They noted for instance how they "would never attend a theatrical play just to be seen in the right circles" (Samuel) or "make the *faux pax* of ordering a common wine, despite being one's favourite, at some distinctive dinner" (Tony). Such utterances, of course, had the function to debase the affluentials' habitus of hedonism - that is, their perception that the quality of life improves by owning things that are commonly perceived as luxurious. In this manner, the déclassé hoped to demonstrate the superiority of their metaphysical approach towards everyday life resulted from their culture of reflexivity. The OMC, on the other hand, felt their dominant status in the middle class to be threatened by the NMC's sharp increase of symbolic capital. Afraid that the NMC would encroach further upon their dominant status, the OMC emphasised how the values and interests that characterise their class faction were the result of recent scheming :

> "Nowadays, many objects are attributed a high cultural value. Everybody feels free to judge and have an opinion on everything. Some things that pass as 'culture' are nothing but 'sham'. Maltese literature is not as good as English literature. Full-stop!" (Louis)

Two exceptions were found in relation to 'class dis-identification'. Primarily, in view of their habitus, the small 'political activist' sector within the suburban blues faction held steadfast commitment to radical politics so that members clung on to traditional styles of class identification. Whilst other working-class peers constructed their class identification in a passive manner - that is, by disassociating themselves from other established identities – this small sector were very proactive. Their account of class was collective, explicit, and oppositional with much their language on class identification was peppered with "us" and "them" terms referring to 'honest/hard-working/manual' workers and 'dishonest/free-riding/comfortable' families. Secondly, respondents' narratives included a consistent use of locality as a reference point for class identification. During interviews subjects went as far as to allege the 'working-classness' and 'middle-classness' of their respective regions. Roger was proud of living all his life in Vittoriosa, perceiving this city to represent

the ‘cradle’ of skilled labour, and was quick to contrast the virtues of Vittoriosa with other drawbacks of middle-class localities. Russell, on the other hand, described Attard as “including well-to-do families with strong Christian values and holding professional jobs”, and also compared Attard positively with other localities in Southern Malta. Subjects living in ‘working-class’ areas perceived middle-class ways of life as ‘pretentious’; on the other hand, subjects living in ‘middle-class’ areas thought of working-class lifestyles as ‘crude’. Far form being inert backdrops, real and imagined spaces arise as symbols or strategies of domination and reproduction.

The starting point for the study of class identity in later life is to recharacterise the absence of strong collective class consciousness as evidence of class. The absence of collective class identities does not provide evidence in favour anti-class analysis since the presence of dis-identifications still demonstrated how class position acted as a constraint on aspirations, tastes, and resources, and hence, how class remains an important element in shaping social identity. However, rather than backing the prevailing assumption that class dis-identification reflects the triumph of the middle-class in the class struggle, class constitutes a strategy of class identification utilised by all classes.

**Cohorts, generation, and class**

Another key interest consisted in analysing whether class was being superseded by generational forms of consciousness. Data, however, indicated clearly that this was not the case and that the class habitus remained primary to cohort and generational experience in shaping social solidarities and interests. Data analysis uncovered two main cohorts of individuals born within the years 1919-1928 and 1929-1939 - that is, subjects in the 65-75 and 76-85 age brackets during the time of the interviews. Taking late teenagehood and early adulthood as key points of reference, data found that whilst subjects born in the former decade experienced a negative coupling between the available opportunities and their social development, the opposite was the case for their younger peers. Indeed, those born in the years 1919-1928 found that their developmental transitions constrained by the Second World War, medium-to-low economic growth, high rates of unemployment, and sparse state welfare.

For instance, Jules (born 1920) was too old to enrol in post-war educational programmes. Holding no educational or vocational skills, but was already married with three children, he had no alternative but to seek unskilled employment. A similar pattern occurred when the Malta Labour Party won the 1971 elections since at the age of 51 years he was too old to benefit from either the distribution of free housing or other economic allowances to engaged couples and young families. Another problem was that Jules was already retired when Malta embarked on an eight-year economic boom (1987-1995), and thus, unable to benefit from this positive socio-economic development. The government's drive to enter the EU also resulted in further drawbacks for Jules since the privatisation of state-owned corporations meant that a number of services ceased to be free or subsidised by the state. In this respect, it is not surprising that subjects born in the 1919-1928 cohort held a 'cautious' approach to everyday life. As Jules asserted,

> "My economic situation does not permit me to spend any money on fancy items. I must make sure that if something happens there is enough money to cover the expenses. What if I fall ill and need expensive medications? In life you can never take anything for granted. Life is one constant struggle". (Jules, born 1920)

The concepts of cohort and generation, as Laslett (1996) argued, are inherently relational. Indeed, the aforementioned findings contrast well with those held by subjects born in the years 1929-1939. These subjects experienced a more positive coupling between their personal and structural transitions as their key life events met medium-to-high economic growth, average-to-low unemployment, the introduction of welfare benefits, and a stable socio-economic order. Subjects also benefited from the intensive investment in public education during post-war times so that many succeeded in entering the civil service or enrol in a professional career - such as teaching or nursing - for which no university degree was necessary then. They were still in employment during the 1987-1995 economic boom and therefore entered retirement with a higher levels of savings and pension income. Such experiences imbued subjects born in

this cohort-cum-generation with an optimist personality and a propensity to engage in consumer culture :

> "I always tell my husband that as long as our health is fine there is nothing to worry about in life. Yesterday, our video-recorder stopped functioning. It does not matter a thing to me. I am not even going to try to fix it. They are so cheap nowadays…We are lucky to have friends that appreciate the things that we love. Every Sunday afternoon, we go for long walks and always stop at some nice cafeteria for coffee. What do you want more from life?" (Rita, born 1934)

As may be expected, subjects being born in these different cohorts held a distinct generational habitus. Subjects born in the years 1919-1928 tended to subscribe to a traditional approach to human ageing by assuming that most older people cannot contribute significantly to the 'real world', and even perceiving themselves as simply clients or patients in need of professional expertise and intervention. The 1929-1939 cohort, on the other hand, rejected ageing as a transition from productivity to disengagement and associated well-being in later life with accessing the full benefits of consumer culture. These subjects detached their identity from past occupations and family responsibilities, and instead, perceived retirement as a progressive set of options and choices. So far, data supported Gilleard-Higgs' (2000, 2002) claim that the combination of the emergence of a consumer culture and a young adulthood stage equipped incumbents with the best possible temperament to become part of the third age generation. Yet, the real issue is whether the coming of the third age generation actually brings a decline of class identities/interests. Data rejected this supposition and indicated that it was class cultures and habitus - more than either cohort or generational experiences - which remained the principal factors influencing older individuals' consciousness, identities and interests. Indeed, the strongest forms of solidarity occurred amongst subjects within class-based generational 'units' or across generations but holding similar class positions and trajectories. Although Roger (suburban blues - born 1925) and Jacob ('new' middle class - born, 1926) were born only one year apart - and thus, experienced

a similar historical location - they held opposite dispositions which emerged from their diverse class milieus. The fact that Jacob's father held a white-collar position within the civil service equipped him with sufficient economic and cultural capital for a smooth transition into one of the paramedic professions. Roger's family, conversely, experienced cyclical unemployment so that his early years were characterised by both absolute and relative poverty. Marrying partners from similar class backgrounds, Roger and Jacob experienced further cumulative advantages and disadvantages (respectively) during adulthood. On one hand, Tony and his wife lived comfortable lives and finding time to engage in meaningful leisure pursuits such as visiting the theatre and cultural exhibitions, as well as going abroad to Rome, London, and Paris. Roger's family, on the other hand, was always falling behind their payments as his job at a factory producing paints was heavily under-paid. Hence, these subjects reached later life with different levels of capital and life chances with Roger, of course, being the one most worse-off.

Despite their similar historical location - they expressed no feeling of solidarity towards each other. Whilst Roger blamed much of his hardship in life on more same-aged peers in more powerful classes who obstructed the setting of Socialist policies back in the 1970s and 1980s, Jacob adopted a 'blame the victim' standpoint by stressing how working-class peers like Roger became impoverished as a result of their own individual doing. The following excerpts demonstrate clearly how diverse class cultures, habitus, and trajectories act as strong obstacles to the generation of a generational *camaraderie* :

> "The problem was that the [Malta] Labour Party was resisted by prosperous individuals who were insensitive to the situation of underprivileged peers. For example, both my two brothers were opposed to Socialism. They were self-employed and angry that they could not increase their prices as much as they wanted. They, and others like them, worked hard to topple the socialist government and they eventually succeeded." (Roger)

> "To be honest with you I am somewhat angry that so many taxes have to go in welfare benefits. There are only

> a few who deserve our help. The others brought their unfortunate situation by their own account. I know people with whom I have been together at school who never wanted to either study or work. Others smoke, drink, and have children outside wedlock. No wonder then that they find themselves without property or savings." (Jacob)

Even subjects in the 1929-1939 generation approached and rationalised their participation in consumer culture according to their diverse class habitus. Whilst Kate (suburban blues, born 1931) claimed to enjoy visiting ballrooms where "you only pay once but dance as much as you like" and buffet dinners as "you can eat how much you want", Silvia ('new' middle class, born, 1932) was in awe of different types of cultures so that she "never missed the annual local film festival". Karen's (wealthy metropolitan, born, 1934) consumption patterns, on the other hand, revolved around the learning of interior design so as to furnish her semi-detached house with a more modern style fully equipped with the latest technological accessories. Coincidentally, all three subjects bought a DVD player some months preceding the interview. Yet, the process underlying such a purchase was highly class-related. Whilst Kate bought the player "after saving up for almost six months to the extent that [she] thought [she] would never afford it", Silvia decided to go for it because she "enrolled in a DVD lending library containing a lot of interesting titles". Karen, on the other hand, just bought it "on the spur of the moment". This shows strongly how a generational entelechy does not arise in a class vacuum, and is experienced and practiced differently according to particular class positions and trajectories. The primacy of class over generation was also apparent in subjects' preferences in social networking as membership issues, friendship, and companionship to occurred along class lines. Whilst generation organizes our social worlds in ways as profoundly as gender, class, or ethnicity, it remains that the class habitus remained primary in shaping social imageries and interests in later life. Gilleard-Higgs' argument is faulty for stressing too much on the coupling between the emergence of consumption and early adulthood, and so, ignoring that 'generationing' results from the experience of a lifetime. Indeed, a generational consciousness is made up of the realisation

and failing of opportunities and expectations during the *entire* life course rather than simply what occurs during early adulthood.

**Emotional landscapes of class**

Classic and contemporary studies alike demonstrated how class relations have a significant effect on personal and social emotions. Class relations in later life were intimately entwined with positive characteristics such as satisfaction, pride and happiness, as well as more negative emotions such as resentment, defensiveness, guilt, shame, envy, deference, contempt, arrogance, pride, rage, satisfaction, embarrassment and pity. Class truly matters in later life because in addition to providing subjects with material security it also affected subjects' chances of living a fulfilling life. Traditionalists felt embarrassed for holding low levels of class capital. They tended to reconcile such negative feelings with various defence mechanisms, but especially, avoidance, altruism, and religious introjection. Another quandary faced by traditionalists was with respect to their alliance with the Nationalist Party. Although this party valued order, tradition, and gradual change - policies which made it very popular among traditionalists - it also favoured a liberal-economy market, minimal state intervention in economic affairs, and the privatisation of collective welfare. This generated some contradiction since such economic measures generally function to undermine traditional and communal ways of coping and adjustment. As expected, such divergent policies served to perplex and even frustrate subjects in the traditionalist class faction.

Subjects in the suburban blues and affluentials class factions experienced two conflicting sentiments. On one hand, subjects voiced satisfaction at reaching statutory retirement age since this meant that they did not have to worry anymore about possible lay-offs, working in hazardous settings, long working hours, feeling upset about the exploitative nature of their jobs, or owning small shops which made sparse profit. They were proud of belonging to a working class culture, believing that they occupied a high moral ground as a result of their honesty, hard work and respect towards more skilled workers. Many were also very pleased that everything they held in life and all their achievements cannot be attributed to either the accident of birth or inheritance :

> "I always worked and studied hard. My parents never encouraged me or gave me any money or helped me in finding a job. The upper class have it real easy : even if you are a thick in your head your parents will arrange everything for you. I faced many obstacles in my life." (Petra)

Yet, these same members were also fraught by feelings of anxiety and dejection as they were aware that subjects in more powerful class positions considered them inferior. They also felt short-changed by the present government since after paying so much national insurance, the privatisation of state welfare meant that many services ceased to be free or heavily subsidised. Another source of disappointment for suburban blues and affluentials emerged from their experiences of social exclusion. Of course, 'social exclusion' is relative and is experienced by all class subjects, irrespective of class position. Nevertheless, the combination of low levels of class capital together with a relatively high aspiration to escape or, at least, improve their class position meant that it was suburban blues and affluentials who experienced the most intense psychological pain from social exclusion. Suburban blues were very upset by their inability to access material, social, and spatial resources. Although it was positive to note that all had access to basic utilities such as electricity, water, and telephone, they cut back on using these services for otherwise the bill would be too high. In this respect, Kate embarrassingly claimed :

> "When my daughter leaves my grandchildren for a day I am really anxious. They are too young to understand that lights must be kept off as much as late in the evening as possible...I make sure that the television is switched off if they are not watching it. My husband scolds them." (Kate)

Lack of material resources also precluded them from extending and participating fully in social networking. Subjects expressed concern at their experiences of spatial exclusion since many lived in 'non-viable' areas which meant that they experienced unsuitable shopping markets. Whilst those living in the midst of a developmental resurgence found that shops cater to the exclusive and expansive interests of younger persons, others

residing in the fringe of localities reported increasing transport difficulties and expenses to reach indispensable shops. Moreover, residing in deprived areas meant less-than-adequate access to social- and care-related services since welfare and health centres in such localities were heavily over-subscribed. Affluentials - despite their higher-than-average levels of economic capital - also failed to escape the negative effects of class as they strove to come to terms with their novel identity. Their lives oscillated between an interest in retaining the emotional bond with life-long friends and acquaintances in the suburban blues class faction on the one hand, and an aspiration to inch closer towards a middle-class position on the other. This resulted in much discomfort as affluentials found both endeavours difficult to achieve :

> "When I meet my family I feel caught between two worlds : the one I lived in the past and the one I am living in the presents. It is not a pleasant experience. It is as if you do not belong elsewhere" (Noel)

> "We are very careful where to go during weekends. For New Year's Eve we decided to go for a ballroom dinner at [a recent five-star hotel in Malta]. We never felt at ease. They came from different backgrounds than ours." (Sandra).

The small subgroup of political activists in the suburban blues experienced an additional dimension of the double-edged sword of class-related emotions. Despite radical activisms generates high levels of fulfilment and ego integrity following long-standing involvement in political activities and organisations, this came at a price. All voiced some regret that long hours of volunteering and attending political meetings made them neglect both their families of origin and procreation. Ben, for instance, was remorseful that he participated little in his children's upbringing, and for providing inadequate social and psychological support to his wife. Moreover, their high levels of class consciousness meant that they held great contempt towards those accents, appearances, comportments, values, and lifestyles associated with higher class positions.

Subjects in middle and dominant class subjects held high levels of confidence, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and locus-of-control. They perceived social outcomes to be internally controllable by people's own efforts and actions, rather than as externally controlled by either chance or outside forces. Subjects in these classes were also successful in orientating their lives in such a way so their identity was no longer dependent on their previous work role. Yet, this is not to say that such subjects experienced no negative sensations since their class position was also a consistent source of anxiety and insecurity. This arose because they worried that people from the working class would be resentful of their higher status and more comfortable lifestyle. Subjects were also afraid of failing to hold on to their class position in face of internal and external threats to their class. This was especially true of the déclassé and wealthy metropolitans who were extremely conscious of their decline in symbolic power in recent years :

> "Since retirement my life has gone downhill. My purchasing power decreased and I have become increasingly depressed. Waking up and having to face another day without going to work makes me feel worthless. It has been difficult" (Samuel)

> "It is funny. I thought I had everything planned for my retirement…[pause]…financially, socially, and even psychologically. Yet, I still feel lost. I feel that my family and community looks at me different now that I am retired. I cannot turn the clock back, can I? (William).

Women held unique emotional experiences. Those in the traditionalist class faction experienced the least of emotional predicaments as their devout following and practice of Roman Catholicism influenced them to accept their subjugated position within the class hierarchy as 'natural'. Women in the suburban blues and affluentials class factions, on the other hand, professed much malcontent with their present situation. Most held poor and insecure backgrounds so that their perception of marriage as a secure escape-route from a past characterised by lack of achievement and direction and towards a more successful future did not materialise. To

their irritation many found such aspirations difficult to achieve. Their husbands' tended to be locked in vulnerable and low-income occupations with the bulk of family caring being their sole responsibility. This generated a "stressful and frustrating life where you never achieve both your short-term and long-term goals…always counting your expenses, always on the verge of a mental breakdown" (Doreen). Moreover, women in the suburban blues and affluentials class factions were upset by the fact that their quality of life took a turn for the worse in later life. In Vera's words,

> "I thought that my old age [sic] would be better than that of my parents. However, my old age [sic] is not so different. My life went back to 'square one' [laughing]. Of course, my pension is higher but the feeling is the same. You feel sad because you have to calculate every move since money is limited. You have to take care of your grandchildren, your aunts, your husband. It is too much!" (Mary)

Middle-class women experienced the highest levels of emotional satisfaction. They held the best combination of psychological and social factors to achieve what is generally defined as 'successful ageing'. This is because these women were highly flexible and open to learning new coping skills which are necessary to the onset of later life. Middle-class women boasted strong and healthy levels of social relationships, wellbeing, self-efficacy, socio-economic status, and coping skills. Interestingly, such positive emotions even extended themselves to middle-class widows since their high endowment of cultural and physical capital put them in a favourable position to learn those tasks that were previously the role of their husbands as well as to make new connections to 'fill' the interpersonal void arising from widowhood. Their mastery and success in these tasks led to an enhanced level of confidence in themselves as capable human beings. Women in the dominant class also experienced both emotional satisfaction and tensions following their position in the class space and household respectively. Satisfaction was derived from being financially secure and independent from their husbands, as well as from their membership in elite clubs where they also held important roles.

Yet, these women also faced specific tensions and contradictions as they were expected to style their lives according to their husbands' needs, take sole responsibility for running the household, not to interfere in anything unrelated to the domestic sphere, and even support the impression that their wealth was the result of their husbands' success at work. Blanca expressed such frustrations as follows :

> "He never helped in the household. I do not like this attitude but men are like that I guess! [laughing] I try to be very efficient because otherwise the house would be impossible to manage… Anyhow, I do not want paint too negative a picture of my husband. He is a kind and generous man. Yet, it remains that I had to model my life around his business and personal interests" (Blanca)

Class positions and trajectories generate ways of thinking and feeling which comprises the 'lived culture' of a particular epoch, class, or group. It highlighted the links between individuals' inner emotional worlds and external structural processes to illustrate the ways in which class is implicated in the fashioning of selves. However, although class arises as an unsettling subject, one that prompts feelings of shame as well as self-justification (Sayer, 2005 : 306), it is also fair to conclude the subjugated classes who bear the greatest psychological burdens of an unequal society.

**Class mobility and identification**

This section provides a discussion of subjects' class mobility following the employment-to-retirement transition, as well as an account of the meaning that such movements had for the individuals concerned. There two possible patterns of class mobility, apart from being upward or downward. 'Vertical' class mobility occurs when classes register changes in their levels of total volume of capital since this generally also equips incumbents with an increase of social power for incumbents. 'Horizontal' movements in the class space occurs when a preponderance of one type of asset gives way to a preponderance of some other resource such as when subjects engage in the 'conversion' of some kind of capital

in some other. Class factions experiencing an 'upward' vertical mobility included professional careerists and affluentials. The latter experienced upwardly 'vertical' mobility due to their recent increase of economic capital. This influenced them to live a more prosperous lifestyle, as well as experience a psychological and materialist break with the suburban blues. During adulthood, professional careerists were subject to the 'power elite' since successful entrepreneurs and well-connected families usually got the upper hand in the competition for class capital. Yet, with the onset of later life their academic expertise and knowledge in matters of social policy rendered them highly valuable to civil society. This occurred because both the general public and society leaders perceived the cultural and intellectual resources held by professional careerists to actually improve as incumbents reach later life. Rather than facing an increasing barrage of ageist experiences, professional careerists were thus successful in claiming the positive aspects of ageing such as increasing wisdom, experience, confidence, and freedom. This enabled them to embark on 'productive' lives that procured them with higher levels of capital :

> "My life changed dramatically recently. I am participating in many new activities. Lately I also teach [a European language] at [a local adult education programme]. Even my husband is still working as his employer was not able to find someone to replace him." (Agatha)

The 'new' middle class [NMC] also experienced an 'upward' class trajectory albeit of a 'horizontal' character. This occurred as a result of their success in embracing, participating, and mastering a third-age lifestyle. Although hindered by a lack of 'embodied' cultural capital, the NMC succeeded through their autodidact lifestyle to excel in subjects outside the mainstream of conformist education and higher culture such as ethnic cuisine and wine-tasting. Although in 'modern' times such activities did not imbue performers with high levels of symbolic capital, the coming of the hegemony of the third age actually functioned to reverse such a trend. In other words, the strengthening of NMC's levels of symbolic capital resulted from subjects conversion of their cultural capital to a range of cognitive skills and personality attributes which may be labelled

as ‘identity capital’. Class factions experiencing ‘vertical’ downward mobility included wealthy metropolitans and déclassé. Throughout their adulthood the ‘power elite’ wielded great influence both in local and national politics as a result of their leading position in successful commercial enterprises. Yet, as they reached later life they felt pressured to relinquish most or all of their power to their children. Whilst their children were no longer ready to play second fiddle, their wives grew tired of organising home entertainment and attending receptions. Age discrimination and prejudice also played a key role in pressuring wealthy metropolitans to retire since people in their seventh and eighth decades of life are thought to be incapable of leading successful businesses. As wealthy metropolitans relinquished their role in the business enterprise, they also lost the social capital that is attached to directorships of entrepreneurial organisations. Indeed, despite their wealthy position no class faction experienced as much a relative decline in symbolic power than wealthy metropolitans :

> “I feel somewhat distressed by the fact that following retirement my children stopped consulting me on anything related to the family’s business. I also noticed that my staff seems to have less time for me. They respect me less now that I am older. My wife tells me that this is all my imagination. I do not think so.” (Henry)

The déclassé also experienced ‘vertical’ downward mobility since members in this class faction found it difficult to carry on their class power over the retirement transition. As many held clerical careers in civil and government agencies, their cultural capital was, ultimately, vested in a bureaucratic setting. Thus, their power was largely ineffectual outside their work context since the asset of organisation cannot be owned in the same way as property and skills. It has no existence apart from the positions within which it is exercised and cannot be transferred by its owner from one use to another. Organisational forms of capital are context-specific and ineffectual outside an organisational base. Such experiences influenced the déclassé to experience their retirement transition in a negative manner :

> "When I worked I was somebody. [As a principal officer,] I knew all the procedures and where all the files were deposited. Few could work without my knowledge. I tried working part-time but stopped after a few weeks. They operated on a different way from the one I was used to. I do not know what to do." (Gino)

Traditionalists and suburban blues experienced downward mobility of a 'horizontal' character. Although members in such class locations experienced no change in their levels of class capital, as they reached the latter phases of the life course their lack of class capital made them more vulnerable to age discrimination. Subjects thus experienced higher and more intense levels of social exclusion, as well as a decline in their levels of symbolic capital. Members of the 'old' middle class [OMC] experienced no mobility as their class habitus functioned to embed subjects in conservative and protective paths. The OMC were confident of their dominance within the middle class so that their lives revolved around the maintenance of this class distinction. The fact that subjects formed part of third or fourth generation middle-class families endowed them with robust levels of embodied cultural capital which functioned to make both inward and outward flows in this class a difficult achievement. Yet, their relative low volume of either institutional cultural capital, social capital or economic capital next to wealthy metropolitans and professional careerists meant that they had insufficient authority to form part of the dominant class.

There are interesting data with respect to the role of widows in the class structure and as far as class mobility is concerned. Although women experienced widowhood as a traumatic event and reacted by withdrawing from social interaction, many eventually made an effort to re-integrate themselves in the community. One surprising finding was that widows in middle-class positions experienced impressive levels of 'horizontal' mobility in their class trajectories. This result contradicts the stereotypical (and patriarchal) view that widowhood tends to thrust women in a downward mobile trajectory. Subjects claimed how throughout their whole marriage their potential was generally kept in-check or only encouraged if its consequences were in line with their families' interests. This situation changed with the death of their husbands which put them

in the driving seat with respect to decisions affecting their financial assets. Interestingly, middle-class widows did not approach this task with a conservative attitude and made use of their new role with the intent of improving their lives. Claire's and Jenny's life histories constitute good examples of this trend :

- Claire enrolled as a mature student at the University of Malta to read law. Success in exams gave her much confidence which helped her to expand her social networking. Following her graduation she began working as a notary with a voluntary organisation and when we met for the interview she had just been successfully elected as the vice-president of a notable women's organisation.

- Jenny surprised everyone by dealing successfully in property. She sold her family house and bought three flats in a seaside village. After keeping one for herself she sold the other two flats for a good profit. Jenny repeated this strategy a number of times in the past decade and a half. Now she is wealthier than when her husband was alive and is also invited to many high-profile events in the community.

These life stories challenge the conventional accounts of widows as impoverished and dependent individuals, and throw light on their potential to advance their class situation. However, one must emphasise that such successful stories derived only from widows in the middle class. The fact that no widows in the working class did not hold sufficient class capital to be able to invest for a better future indicates strongly that class position plays a major role in the life chances of widows. In fact, the life histories with widows in the working class painted a truly opposite picture :

> "Since [my husband] died my life has taken a turn for the worse. My income decreased and with the interest on savings being at just one percent…[pause] …I do not understand much. How do you improve? My husband used to take care of everything, now it is my children who are in charge…" (Mary)

> "After paying my husband's funeral I realised that my savings do not amount to much. This house is not mine. I never worked. My children sometimes help me by taking me with them on vacations though I feel uncomfortable. I do not know why I ended in this situation." (Ingrid)

Class mobility does not cease with one's retirement from the productive workforce. On the contrary, class trajectories continue to develop throughout whole life course with the possibility that retirees experience both 'vertical' and 'horizontal' forms of upward and downward mobility. Although the necessary extensive data to investigate the 'levelling', 'maintenance', and 'cumulative advantage' hypotheses was lacking, interviews hinted clearly that all three forces are actually present during the later phases of the life course. This is because whilst the difference in levels of class capital between professional careerists and traditionalists actually increased with retirement, the class trajectories of both affluentials and 'new' middle class indicated how later life might also bring a decrease in socio-economic differences amongst same-class factions.

# 6

## BOUNDARY WORK : FROM CLASS STRUGGLE TO CLASS ACTION

### The individualisation of class practice

One key concern was to chart the unfolding of subjects' participation in class struggle as they reached later life. Data backed the culturalist path in class research as it found that older persons shifted their involvement from a 'collective' to an 'individualised' form of class practice. Most subjects had extensive experiences in participating in political demonstrations and protests. This was not surprising considering the political turmoil in Malta in the years leading to and during the Socialist era. Middle- and dominant-class subjects found it hard to remain unemotional and detached when recounting how the Socialist government requisitioned their various resources - such as vacant property and funds in foreign banks - for the use of the State. The 1980s were especially restless for these class subjects as they took part in political and peaceful demonstrations organised by the Nationalist Party and the Church respectively. Conversely, suburban blues and affluentials held no secret of their loyalty towards the Malta Labour Party and approval of the Socialist era. They perceived this period as an important watershed in their life course since the implementation of socialist policies brought an immense improvement in their quality of life (especially in terms of workers' rights and welfare services/ allowances).

Despite such strong political sentiments subjects were reluctant to take part in class-related demonstrations and protests at the time of the interview. This choice was related to an increasing distrust of political organisations, reluctance to depend on others, and confidence in being able to achieve their objectives on their own steam. Instead, classes opted for different 'individualised' strategies of class struggle, according to their unique cultures and habitus. Traditionalists, for instance, preferred to contacting subjects in the dominant class to ask for advice and intervene

on their behalf. For them, 'patronage' presented the most fruitful way of coping with difficult circumstances and problems coming their way :

Ernest : In life you have to do what is necessary. You have to work hard. Nobody gives you anything on a silver plate!
MF : Why do you say that?
Ernest : Nothing in particular...[pause]…Well, last week my application for a state-subsidised helper was turned down because my daughter is listed under my address.
MF : I am sorry to hear that. Do you think that this procedure is fair? What are you going to do now?
Ernest : Well, I went to speak to somebody who works with at the Ministry who advised me to tell my daughter to list some other address on her identity card. He said that he will take care of the rest.
MF : Were you not embarrassed to approach him?
Ernest : Embarrassed? [laughing] I am not shy to approach them for help. It is my right to do so! Anyhow, everybody does the same.

The drive of traditionalists to seek patronage emerged as a logical, albeit unconscious, effect of their culture of indigenousness. Moreover, their affinity to engage in clientelism resonated well with their strong religious affiliations. Indeed, one can say that the traditionalists' image of society was paralleled in religious terminology with an image of God on top, as the Supreme Patron, followed by interrelated strata of patrons and clients. Such data backed up what Newby (1977) termed as the 'deferential dialectic' which describes the manner in which the dominant class defined, evaluated, and managed the relationship from above as much as it was interpreted, appraised, and manipulated from below. A deferential performance does not necessarily imply that subjects subscribe faithfully to a deferential personality but may be reacting only according to his/her role in the power relationship.

Suburban blues, affluentials and the middle class, on the other hand, abandoned class-related unities and took advantage of the mass media to air their grievances and seek fair retribution. The pluralisation of the mass media in the 1990s led to higher levels of democracy which, in

turn, engendered an individualisation of interests. Reflecting their particular forms of habitus and class capital, suburban blues and affluentials generally made use of the mass media (especially radio programmes) to communicate the material problems they were facing in everyday life and their dissatisfaction with the government. Middle-class subjects, on the other hand, preferred to participate in televised programmes and writing opinion-letters to newspapers' editors to highlight those instances which they perceived as unjust and unfair. Hence, the mass media - eulogised by reflexive modernists and postmodernists alike as signalling the coming of endless social flux and fluidity - actually had a key role in contemporary forms of class structuring and action. Far from encouraging passive and pointless consumption, public media functioned as a counter-hegemonic apparatus. Equipped with higher levels of cultural capital, it is the middle class which was the most successful in achieving their class interests

Dominant-class subjects struggled to maintain their elite status in society through their 'connections' with power-holders in civil society, and owners and managers in private companies. When a problem came their way, both wealthy metropolitans and professional careerists professed to contact influential 'friends' or 'relatives' to help them solve the issue. Although this pattern of behaviour may seem equivalent to the 'clientelism' practised by traditionalists, such parallelism is mistaken since dominant-class subjects generally contacted persons whom they considered as equals. They did not perceive themselves as asking for a 'favour', and thus, hold a moral obligation to return it. It was not a relationship between a powerful patron and a deferential client but one between two 'friends', between equals :

William : In Malta you never obtain much if you go through the proper channels. I contact friends who I know may help me or recommend me to others.

MF : So, do you feel that this is the best way to meet your interests?

William : Certainly! When my daughter ran the risk of having her scholarship discontinued because my income was more than a certain amount I was not going to waste time contacting political leaders or union officials or NGOs! I contacted

somebody whom I knew from school who put in a good word for me and others who were in the same boat. This clause in the contract was eventually dropped.

MF : Do you feel that you are in obligation to return this favour?

William : Not at all! These people are my friends. We have a long history of friendship. There is no pressure to return the favour.

Despite the struggle between wealthy metropolitans and professional careerists for symbolic legitimacy, there was a strong relationship of solidarity between them. Whilst professional careerists helped wealthy metropolitans to acquire confidential information that aided them to present better offers for various tenders issued by the government, wealthy metropolitans offered services to professional careerists at very nominal prices.

The 'old' middle class [OMC] and a small selection of the suburban blues, were, however, notable exceptions. Contrary to other peers, subjects in these class factions defended and advanced their class interests by uniting with others of the same opinion and demonstrating their feelings in a public and collective manner. In fact, subjects were consistent attendees at protests, rallies and manifestations organised by either political party or trade unions. A knee-jerk explanation as to why the OMC and a small selection of the suburban blues continue to take part in 'collectivised' class politics is that these factions boast a lifelong interest in such an activity. However, this justification is unsatisfactory since it does not clarify why others with similar life-course experiences shunned 'collectivised' class practices. The presence of the OMC on the side of mass engagement also problematised the stereotypical distinction between 'working-class collectivism' and 'middle-class individualism'. The enthusiasm of these two class factions for class struggle was the result of three factors. Primarily, class subjects who have experienced sharp transitions in their quality of life due to class-related changes tend to develop an acute 'subjective' identification with their 'objective' class position. The OMC and the small selection of the suburban blues experienced negative and positive changes in their quality of life following the advent and fall of the Socialist regime. Secondly, data also highlighted a relation between 'collectivised' class struggle and class totality. Indeed, both the OMC and the small selection of the suburban blues not only

accepted ‘class relations’ as a defining feature of industrial society but also perceived opportunities and misfortunes in life to arise directly from particular class locations. Thus, they perceived the strengthening of their class positions through ‘collectivised’ class struggles as the best possible means to safeguard and improve their levels of class capital. Thirdly, ‘collectivised’ class struggle was related to a fear of relative downward mobility. While some suburban blues felt that they were losing out to affluentials in their drive to join the middle class, the OMC felt frustrated that it was the ‘new’ middle class which held the upper hand as who aged ‘successfully’. Threatened by the upward mobility experienced by the NMC and affluentials, they protected their levels of symbolic capital by supporting old class politics.

One cannot therefore reject the argument that we are living in increasingly individualised settings. Only a limited section of older persons sought to protect and advance their class interests through emancipatory politics. Nevertheless, this is not the same as saying that late modern societies are devoid of class relations or practice since data demonstrated clearly how older persons waged class action through individualised strategies.

**Gerotranscendence and class struggle**

Older persons tend to reach a gerotranscendal phase in their psychological maturity which functioned to decline their concern in pursuing their class interests. This occurs because in addition to prioritising a spiritual perspective on daily living, gerotranscendence also promotes a need for solitude and selective socialising. Interviewees generally reported that, as they reached later life, they experienced a number of stressful events and turning points. Frequently cited events included the marrying of all their children, death of a loved one (usually the spouse but also parents, aunts, siblings, children, or close friends), the onset of a particular disability or illness either to oneself or spouse, the increasing frailty and wrinkling of their bodies, and feeling helpless in view of the inevitably of death. Subjects recounted how as a result there were relatively long periods in which they felt increasingly anxious and pensive, and how these transitions also influenced them to redefine their meta-perspective of life. Yet, they also acknowledged that things did not remain like that

for long and that they were eventually successful in resolving such emotive issues by embracing a non-materialist and spiritual attitude. Indeed, a range of data - as the following excerpts demonstrate - confirmed that most subjects had actually reached a gerotranscendal stage of psychological maturity :

> "My ideal leisure activity is walking by the sea. It is a very calming experience. I do eat out and also frequent the cinema and the theatre, but such leisure outings tire me. I get tired talking to people and all that noise makes me dizzy". (Nina)

> "I do not look down on illegal immigrants. What if my children were in their situation? The most important thing is to be sincere with your feelings. The older I get the more I think that morality is relative. It is less about what is *really* good or bad, but more about doing what you *think* is good". (Louis)

The question at this point regarded the relationship between the process of gerotranscendence on one hand, and class structuring and action on the other. Data revealed three key inferences in this respect. First, subjects located in particular class factions held a higher tendency to reach gerotranscendence. As gerotranscendence contains a certain degree of overlap with a post-materialist and spiritual outlook on daily living - in that it incorporates a declining preoccupation with matters dealing with mortality, egocentrism, and acquisitiveness - it was the traditionalists and the 'new' middle class [NMC] which were the most advanced in this process of human development. The habitus of deference was central in influencing traditionalists to change their definition of time as well as strengthening their connection to earlier generations. Their strong faith in Roman Catholic religion made them relatively unafraid of impending death, and better equipped to reach transcendental ideals of happiness and altruism. Moreover, their habitus of deference was a key influence in becoming less self-centred. Yet, it was NMC subjects who were the most successful in reaching a gerontranscendal phase in their human development. This occurred because their habitus of post-materialism engen-

dered a sceptical attitude towards money, social competition, and the values of market society. Instead, the NMC prioritised freedom of expression and self-actualisation which pushed them towards the discovery of new qualities, the transcendence of their needs in favour of others, and the acceptance of their lives irrespective of any experienced failures. Their taste for post-materialist values also influenced them to become more selective in their acquaintances, preferring deeper relationships with fewer people rather than having various superficial contacts, and to embrace a relativist outlook towards social values. They no longer felt pressured to play to 'the discreet charm of the bourgeoisie' :

> "The good thing about being retired is that you are suddenly free. [MF : That must be a good experience. But exactly, 'free' of what?] Free of the constraints that employment and family life put on you. No more power struggles at work. No more having to play the 'yes-man'. Freedom to think and do as you deem fit" (Russell)

The opposite was true for suburban blues, déclassé, OMC, and wealthy metropolitans. Their worry with financial and physical security on the one hand, and bitterness towards the advent of retirement as it devalued their levels of class capital on the other, acted as key obstacles towards the achievement of gerotranscendence.

A second inference was a negative link between gerotranscendence and class struggle. Achieving gerotranscendence meant that persons' lives become centred around a cosmic dimension where materialist preoccupations become less important than spiritual concerns. This meant that subjects embraced a shift from egoism to altruism as they felt more inclined towards the achievement of tranquillity and wholeness. As expected, these attitudes functioned to inhibit persons from engaging in collective forms of class struggles. Gerotranscendal individuals were more selective and guarded in their social and personal relationships, and indicated a need for and the pleasure of contemplative solitude. It was thus not surprising that subjects experiencing such attitudes and values were less likely to be interested in improving their class position through collective struggles. Subjects in the traditionalist and the NMC factions alike backed Tornstam's (2005 : 68) assertion that whilst "an economic buffer

is good to have,…the volatility of material assets makes savings beyond that meaningless". Brian, for instance, was aware that the celebration of his 50th wedding anniversary was going to reduce his savings in a substantial manner. More than the actual dinner which was going to take place in a hotel, he was going to pay the airfare for his son's family who live in Canada as they could not afford to come. Family unity, for Brian, was more important than financial savings. Similarly, Nina claimed how she was not worried despite the fact that the government was reducing state welfare. Whilst her savings and pension income were average, she felt that she had enough to live a comfortable life, and that her "wisdom…[pause]…acquired as a result of extensive life experience" made her realise how material comfort is only partly related to a good quality of life. As a result, she disengaged completely from class politics and turned her energies on volunteering with the Hospice Movement since this is

> "...based on helping persons to deal with difficult issues [pause] it is not easy to accept death [pause] we deal with all persons in the same manner irrespective of their levels of affluence and cultural background…It is incredible that we waste most of our lives trying to improve our wages and power when ultimately these count little when you think about life in general." (Nina)

A final inference arising from the bond between gerotranscendence and class relations was that married mothers were generally the most advanced in the gerotranscendal process, and thus, the least inclined to show an interest in organised class struggle. Mothering wives held a very strong bond with children so that as they grew older they were inclined to put the interests of their children and grandchildren before their own. Such attitudes and feelings were especially intense in mother-daughter and grandmother-granddaughter relationships which resulted largely from Malta's matrilocal dispositions. While many daughters are reluctant to live far away from their family of origin, when both parents work many generally leave their children under the care of their maternal grandmothers. Moreover, since most married women were never in paid employment they experienced the turbulent periods of Malta's history

and any related repressive situations only through their husbands' experiences rather than first hand. The fact that women tended to be more religious than men acted as another catalyst underlying their gerotranscendal experience. Such a combination of life-course experiences attributed mothers with lower levels of class antagonism and consciousness when compared either to their husbands or other males. Mothers, irrespective of class, were in fact the least inclined to form part of some collective attempt towards the improvement of their interests :

> "I was never one to fight for my interests. We tried to make do with [my husband's] wage. My husband gets very agitated about politics. I do understand him but still think that he exaggerates in his reactions…Sometimes the union ordered them to strike but I never worked so I was never that involved …I am a grandmother now. These things are very far from my mind." (Silvia)

Silvia's assertions also demonstrated that her reluctance to engage in class struggle also emerged from Maltese traditional norms which expect married women to be passive in the public domain. Indeed, in Southern Europe the status of families is generally contingent upon the proactive and passive stances of wives in public and private domains respectively. This was also reflected in my interview with Tina who described how during the Socialist period she and other women used to stay at home taking care of the children while their husbands attended demonstrations and protests organised by the NP. While it is true that one reason behind this was that such events were frequently marred by violence, one may also argue that society treats 'class struggle' as masculine.

Individuals' role in collective forms of class struggle was also undermined by the unique psychological developments accompanying the onset of later life. One here finds evidence highlighting how the achievement of a gerotranscendental phase in people's developmental process acts as a potent barrier towards the engagement of older persons in collective forms of class struggle.

**Consumption and lifestyle : the politics of taste**

The material and symbolic dimensions of consumption occupied central roles in the way that class inequality was experienced and reproduced in later life. Class practice does not only occur over differences in economic security, but also over the definition of what constitutes valued social practices or - in Sayer's (2005) terms - what persons understand by 'goods' in a broad way. The lifetime closeness of traditionalists to the dominant class influenced the former to perceive the 'local' practices as the most valued 'goods' in the struggle for class 'distinction'. This drive was highly apparent from their prevalent use of *sejjieh dekorattiv* - that is, the covering of house facades with rustic stones found in the countryside. The use of *sejjieh dekorattiv* and other conventional artefacts also arose as acts of resistance and defiance to suburban blues and affluentials, and the middle class, whom traditionalists perceived as a threat to their class power. As this excerpt demonstrates, the celebration of tradition served to legitimate the traditionalists' vision of the world over other perspectives :

> "Society is going downhill because many are abandoning our true values. What is the point of mothers going to work when this means spoiling their children? Is this what we really want? Although we are 'common' people you will find that Malta has a lot to learn from us. Dressing liberally, working on Sundays, having massive loans will ruin this country." (Gianni)

For traditionalists, therefore, tradition is increasingly under threat and needs to be carefully defended. Yet, this was not performed for some scope of altruism but because they were aware that if local norms and values expired then this would increase their 'outsider' status in society.

Opposed to the traditionalists' ethos of class action was that of the suburban blues and affluentials. Aware that their relatively elevated class position (vis-à-vis the traditionalists) derived from their success in practicing a consumer lifestyle, suburban blues and affluentials struggled to put 'goods' associated with modernity at the apex of the value pyramid. In other words, they struggled for class position by honouring a lifestyle

where virtuoso skills achieve pragmatic ends - that is, valuing 'function' rather than 'form'. Class, thus, referred to material success. The good life is cast on having an abundance of things, owning things that are popularly understood as luxurious, being removed from physical burden as much as possible, and participating in routine consumption :

> "What is the point of being educated if you do not know how to change a light bulb? It is true that my educational background is not so good. But my house is in good order. We never missed out on anything. It is important to live a comfortable life…I am proud of my skills in carpentry." (Ian)

This attitude and resulting action can be interpreted as evidence of both 'trickle-down' activity and usurpation as suburban blues and affluentials believed that families in more advantageous class positions held better levels of material comfort. However, their struggle to champion 'function' over 'form' meant that their focus was more on their kitchens, living rooms, bathrooms, and bedrooms rather than studies or sitting rooms. Seeking to own objects which they perceived to symbolise a modern lifestyle, suburban blues and affluentials tended to own and extol the advantages of micro-wave ovens, video and DVD recorders, fridge-freezers, washing-machines, colour televisions, stereo-systems, and souvenirs from their (limited) travels. Subjects' upholding of 'function' was highly apparent from their portrayal of their bathroom as a mechanism that generates cleanliness and their perception of food as an important energising activity.

The motivation underlying the participation of the middle class in class practice arose from the fact that suburban blues and affluentials had more access to various resources which in the past were their sole monopoly. In reaction, middle-class subjects strove to celebrate and participate in avenues attributed with high levels of 'refinement' and 'knowledge' which were inaccessible to suburban blues and affluentials. Through their prioritisation of 'form' rather than either 'quantity' or 'function', middle-class subjects emphasised the subjective production of everyday experience through creative, contemplative, and abstract engagement with the world rather than any 'brute' encounters with em-

pirical reality. There were, however, some strong internal divergences according to the way in which middle-class subjects engaged in class practice. As the déclassé and OMC were anxious about the increasing spending power and symbolic capital experienced by affluentials and the NMC respectively, they became very vociferous in their celebration of middlebrow culture. Yet, the NMC faction did not remain passive and reacted by utilising their omnivorousness as an exclusionary strategy - that is, a form of cultural symbolism that reinforces class inequalities. This was done by symbolising the appreciation of all lowbrow, middlebrow and exotic cultural realms as a mark of refinement :

> "I think that in life you have to be flexible. I remember my dad was so traditional that he never succeeded in anything in life. A doctor or notary must also know how to converse with common people. Otherwise, how will they build a faithful clientele? I have always tried hard to experiment with everything. I am able to converse with people from all walks of life." (Russell)

The appreciation of a wider repertoire of cultural genres does not mean that class distinctions are rapidly waning. Rather, omnivorousness arose as a potential mechanism for social distinction, and thus, as a key strategy in competition for class positioning. Middle-class subjects also engaged in intense practices of social exclusion with respect to both other class subjects and within themselves. The déclassé supported the fact that the University of the Third Age engages university professors as lecturers (some of which even conducted their presentations in the English language) which served to discourage working class members, as well as other middle-class peers from seeking membership. The NMC also claimed that their activities contained little publicity and not much information on the event itself since - in Nina's words - "you are either one of us or not…we cannot afford to lose time with curious individuals who eventually decide that they are not interested". Despite their dominant status, even the OMC engaged in social exclusion practices as they worked hard to ensure that influential and leadership positions in the local community associations were always filled by people of a "rich cultural background" (Louis).

The dominant class also engaged in cultural forms of class action. This was especially true for wealthy metropolitans who were anxious not to experience further downward mobility. The general strategy deployed by dominant-class subjects was to display their affinity and participation in elite cultural circles to set themselves apart from middle-class subjects. They generally premised class on the success of their families to gain access to elite social circles where such accomplishment was based on personal recommendations rather than either economic and/or cultural capital alone. In short, dominant-class subjects took part in class action by defining 'success' in the class game as being friends and acquainted with powerful people. Interestingly, families had photographs of themselves or children in an audience with Pope John Paul II, another two had snapshots with the past Prime Minister. These images were the ultimate symbol of elitism amongst both factions in the dominant class since such objects attributed them with unparalleled levels of social legitimacy. The notion of elitism and exclusivity also emerged with respect to their everyday choices in the consumer market ranging from credit cards to their choice of car vehicles. However, it was when subjects referred to their membership in elite clubs that their struggle to impose their subjective definition of 'class', and efforts to exclude other members from edging towards their class boundary, became most clear :

> "We do not advertise our club. Our association is not open to all. You must be recommended by at least three members and then be given the green light by the council members…Membership by-invitation is important because our functions are attended by various dignitaries. You must be of a certain calibre to fit in. It is not a club for the rich as some people accuse us. It is important that members are of a certain class. We have a reputation!" (Henry)

The legitimacy of the dominant class (and the 'new' middle class faction to an extent) was also boosted through the process of codification as the *status quo* spoke favourably of their activities and interests.

It is noteworthy that women, in both the middle and dominant classes, were the most enthusiastic participants in traditional forms of middlebrow and highbrow cultural activities (respectively). Most especially, wives specialised as 'Goffmanian laborers' with their role being the presentation of class symbols to clients or non-family members in an effort to resources into class status. Moreover, women had generally a more intimate appreciation for the specialized and complex forms of culture traditionally labelled 'middlebrow' and 'highbrow' since their role as status labourers made them acquire much expertise in consuming objects of potential symbolic value. Whilst husbands specialised in the household's productive and income tasks, middle- and dominant-class wives took care of the family's class position by converting male-generated resources of money into symbolic capital :

> "My job demanded that I entertain many people over the years and I used to leave everything in [my wife's] hands. Like the other guests I did not have the faintest idea as what we shall be having…Likewise, I always left issues relating to interior design in her hands. I used to give her a budget and she always did miracles. Look how stylish this room is!" (Alan)

This division of gender appreciation was not surprising when you consider that gender-differential patterns of socialization in adolescence tend to instil a greater appreciation of the humanities amongst females than males. On the other hand, parents tend to orient their sons towards the development of skills that are needed in the realms of employment. This also occurred within the educational system where studies have pointed out how male and female students tend to be oriented and encouraged to show interest in expressive and instrumental subjects respectively. In western societies middlebrow and highbrow cultural participation are generally defined as feminine, with men adopting a passive stance since they found such an interest as threatening to their masculine identity. Moreover, one also cannot overlook the fact that women are generally overrepresented in occupational strata that specialize in culture production such as education and the arts so that their tastes tend to gravitate toward the traditionally 'consecrated' objects and aesthetic experiences.

Summing up, what was at stake in the consumption and validation of 'goods' by older subjects was, ultimately, class distinction. Cultural practice, hence, arose powerful symbols as subjects took part in consumer behaviour to circumvent explicit messages about status, wealth and power, while depicting and reinforcing these differences in a visible and compelling way.

**Networks, friends, and connections**

There are various studies denoting how both class positions and mobility are contingent on the quality of the social networks that people can tap into. Later life is no exception as data revealed social capital to be of key consequence for the accession and acquirement of other types of class capital. One common denominator amongst subjects in the dominant class consisted in holding high levels of social capital. Interviews revealed that subjects in this class exhibited strong levels of *homophily* so that, as the familiar phrase has it, 'birds of a feather [truly] flock together'. Although friendship is generally thought as the most voluntary of our social relations and unconstrained by wider social pressures, data backed other research which highlighted how this activity is highly class-patterned. Friendships were usually related to the subjects' life-patterns as their educational and occupational backgrounds on the one hand, and their present roles in organisational activities on the other, functioned to bring together people who are similar. Reflecting Jerrome's (1992) ethnographic research, friendship in later life was largely a middle- and dominant-class affair. Camaraderie emerged most convincingly amongst co-members in voluntary forms of associations where people with higher levels of class capital are as a rule over-represented. Traditionalists had adverse views and experiences with respect to friendships, and instead, demonstrated their affinity with family-knit environments :

> "I am suspicious of friendly people. At work I have seen many friendships [makes a sarcastic face] collapse when such an alliance did not go hand-in-hand with personal interests. I never trusted anybody at work. There is no

> blood thicker than that which runs through family". (Roger).

Married partners tended to come from similar class backgrounds which confirmed that "[c]upid's arrows do not strike the social chess-board at random, but form a diagonal line, perfectly visible in the cross-tabulation of social origin of spouses" (Bozon and Heran, 1989 : 117). This life-pattern had a significant effect on subjects' class careers. Whilst wealthy metropolitans afforded higher levels of economic capital for financial investment, the cultural capital held by wives in professional-careerist and middle-class families was crucial for husbands' advancement in occupational careers. On the other hand, working-class elders claimed that they entered and commenced their familial career - in Jules' words - "from scratch". Deprived of any base of class capital, subjects in these two classes found it hard to escape their class positions :

> "My wife also came from a modest background. Her father worked as a cook in a small tavern. If only we had some money when we married! If only! It is difficult when you have no savings. You really start on the wrong footing and you never recover. I never won the lottery [laughing] (Ben).

Success in the class game was negatively associated with the possession of 'bonding' social capital. Arising out of strong ties and dense personal networks between family, it was not surprising that working-class elders held an abundance of this particular subtype of social capital. Bonding social capital proved to be a highly valuable asset as it bolstered holders' inner selves, mobilised in-group solidarity, generated much-needed reciprocity and enabled subjects to stretch their inadequate income. Nevertheless, it also emerged that tight bonds of trust and solidarity functioned to prevent holders from achieving their full potential. Members in the working class described how family demands held them back from improving their lives such as for example going abroad for training and, in the case of wives, from furthering their education. Their high levels of bonding social capital also reinforced exclusive identities and engendered strong out-group antagonism which precluded them from forging

ties with others in different classes. The following excerpt from the interview with Roger provides a clear indication of the negative association between bonding capital and upward mobility :

> "I had only one lucky strike in my life and I let it go. When the first factory closed down my boss offered me a post in another factory in Singapore. My salary would have increased fourfold. My wife did not want to go because [pause] well, whatever [pause]. She did not want to leave Malta. She wanted to remain united with her family. We decided not to go and spent the next 18 months unemployed" (Roger).

The fact that subjects in subjugated classes tend hold only social capital of a bonding type means that they are always drawing on a dense network of peers who, nevertheless, are also equipped with sparse levels of class capital. Indeed, friendships are of little 'material' use in deprived communities since "social capital tends to act as a conservative force, reproducing inequalities" (Bottero, 2005: 182). Of course, traditionalists were still in close contact with dominant-class subjects, and hence, on paper may be perceived as holding some levels of bridging social capital. In practice, however, they found it difficult to take advantage of such contacts since in retirement they were of little use to their (past) patrons. Reminiscent of Dowd's (1980) exchange theory of power relations, Berta recounted how she and her husband failed to speed up their application to enter a state residential home as they had nothing to offer. Such results provide evidence in favour of Granovetter's (1973) well-known 'strength-of-weak-tie' theory which posits that weak ties are paradoxically more vital to build bridges between communities than strong ties. The dominant class held high levels of both bridging and bonding forms of social capital. Their prominent positions in the business companies or civil society put them in contact with powerful peers as well as with unskilled and semi-skilled personnel. On the other hand, subjects in this class held robust bonds with family relatives that procured them strong levels of emotional and psychological capital. Interviews showed clearly how bridging and bonding forms of social capital fed into each other in a way that granted holders with an efficient access to information, strong

influence on more subjugated agents, and an ability to mask the cultural arbitrariness of their social perspectives. More importantly was that this unique composition of capital gave (dominant-class) subjects the possibility to augment their symbolic capital. This discussion is appealing because it demonstrates that although subjects holding only bonding social capital had their potential for class advancement visibly reduced, others who held such resources in tandem with bridging social capital did not experience such a negative association. In other words, whilst bonding social capital on its own did function to hinder class mobility, the opposite was actually the case when it was coupled with bridging social capital

Middle-class subjects, despite their relative proximity to the dominant classes, held weak to average levels of bridging and bonding social capital. This seemed unexpected as they held strong family values as well as relatively successful careers. However, their culture of reflexivity influenced them to perceive the manipulation of social capital for the attainment of class power as reminiscent of a Mediterranean spirit characterised by colonial politics and a lack of meritocracy. The middle-class looked down on clientelism and patronage as they saw such forms of power brokerage as hindering cultural and political modernisation. Instead, they supported a rational and post-materialist democracy where politicians would base their decisions on the advice of 'objective' knowledge experts (the key reason why many strongly favoured Malta's accession in the European Union). The middle-class remonstrated and resisted clientelistic practices by striving for a rational model of state development where resources are distributed in an impersonal manner according to meritocratic principles. Their distaste for the accumulation and manipulation of social capital were remarked in very clear tones :

> "Malta has gone downhill following Mintoff's influence. He encouraged his supporters to contact government officials for help. Malta, unfortunately, never looked back. But I refuse to do so! Why should I contact somebody for my daughter to be transferred to a better department? My daughter's request should be reviewed by an independent committee who will take a decision that is fair, and if possible, in the interest of both my daughter and the em-

> ployer. Is this too much to ask? Politicians should not have absolute power!" (Russell)

Russell's remarks are interesting because they show how the antipathy of middle-class subjects towards the role of networks in class mobility may be perceived as their unique way of improving their position in the class space. Indeed, it is middle-class subjects who have the most to gain from the decline of traditional politics.

Social capital arises as a hierarchical resource which actors utilise in competitive struggles for class power. Whilst the strength-of-weak-tie argument (Granovetter, 1973) was confirmed, it remains a fact that real life is more complex. One key finding reported here is that when bonding social capital is combined with its bridging forms of networking it actually serves as a catalyst for class mobility and advancement.

**Age, politics, and class**

Emancipatory politics has a key role in people's struggle to improve their lives and transform societies. In later life, this form of politics may be applied to achieve specific class interests as well as to improve the quality of life of older persons as such. This section provides a discussion of these interests as they arise from the data. An analysis of electoral manifestos presented by the three political parties (NP, Greens, and MLP) contesting the 2003 national election indicated that older people did not feature highly on their national political agenda. Whilst both Nationalist and Green parties advocated entry in the European Union [EU] as the best option for Malta's future generations, the Malta Labour Party disagreed. In all manifestos older persons were always referred to in the third person, and thus, deemed as an 'other'. Parties promised that upon election they will ensure that all older persons' needs are met through high-quality state services which unfortunately only served to dehumanise and label older persons as a 'dependent' group. At no stage did political parties claim any interest in militating against those forms of age discrimination faced by older persons in their daily lives or in working towards a higher participate-rate of older persons in various aspects of civil society. Politicians did not perceive older persons as influential or equal players in political and community processes. Older persons were

represented in Maltese society by the *Malta Labour Party Association for Veterans*, the *Nationalist Party Association for the Elderly*, and the *General Workers' Union Retired Persons Association*. Although all three organisations were highly vocal about the situation of local older persons, it was lamentable that as 'umbrella' organisations they were highly subservient to the *ethos* of their parent systems. Whilst the *Nationalist Party Association for the Elderly* endorsed consistently the policies of the (NP) government and stressed the high quality of life enjoyed by local older persons when compared to that enjoyed during the Socialist era, the opposite was the case with respect the remaining two organisations. As experienced by their British counterparts, independent age-interest groups - such as the various organisations coming under the *National Council for Older Persons* - received little media attention and their influence on state policies was limited. Lifestyle-oriented associations took a liberal-humanist view towards ageing and perceived political campaigning as outside the scope of the organisations.

Most subjects believed to have minimal political leverage and were resigned that gerontological issues will never be a political priority :

> "The world has never been preoccupied with the fate of older persons. If you look at the *Budget* you will find that the needs and interests of older persons are never given priority. It is useless protesting. Governments work to improve the lives of children and adults and not older persons". (Samuel)

I countered this and similar assertions by stating that since the number of older persons is steadily increasing, if they joined forces the government would feel pressured to take their opinions more seriously. Yet, subjects were sceptical that older persons may one day emerge as a political force. They pointed out that whilst the political organisation of the older population will always face a number of practical obstacles (ranging from deprived financial circumstances, physical disabilities and inaccessibility to transport, passivity and lethargy due to spouse bereavement, and lower levels of cultural capital), they were no less divided than their younger peers. Although subjects did not mention 'class' as a key dividing variable, many cited differences in 'money', 'education', 'interests',

and ‘power’. Indeed, ‘old age’ is just one of the characteristics older persons identify with and is eclipsed by other self-identifications. In this respect, interviews backed Vincent’s (et al, 2001 : 151) claim that the political efficacy of age-interest groups is hindered by the diversity of older persons on the basis of employment history, cohort and generational positioning, gender, and financial capital : “it is very difficult to create a positive identity for old age as a symbol that people wish to internalise and to which they wish to commit themselves”. Many also claimed to be ready to forfeit their interests in favour of those held by future generations, and were adamant that they would never let their concerns stand in the way of their children’s and grandchildren’s future. Samuel even admitted of having voted in favour of EU accession, despite that this policy went against his interests, on the basis that he believed that this choice augured well for his grandchildren. In other words, whilst subjects tended to change their vote from the left to the right hand side of the political spectrum other than the other way around, at the same time they did not always vote along their interests and did not come up as a self-interested voting bloc.

Class emerged as the most serious obstacle to generational solidarity since different class positions and trajectories engendered contrasting political attitudes and interests. For instance, the lifelong experience of suburban blues and affluentials n the culture of ‘necessity’ influenced them to support what Inglehart (1997) defined as ‘materialist’ values. These included ideals such as maintaining a high level of economic growth, having a stable economy, fighting against crime, making sure that this country has strong defence forces, preserving order in the nation, and fighting rising prices (ibid.). Suburban blues and affluentials were generally antagonistic to the (NP) government as they perceived it to be directly responsible for the recent rise in the cost of living : “Malta needs a new government because this one has failed to control inflation…food prices are exorbitant” (Petra). Moreover, they were also xenophobic towards economic migrants from Africa : “We cannot have blacks [sic] here. We do not have enough jobs for us. They will take our jobs. It is not Malta’s fault that the situation is very bad in Africa” (Maria). On the other hand, the fact that middle- and dominant-class subjects were brought up in more materially secure conditions meant that they prioritised ‘freedom’ over ‘equality’. Thus, they supported postma-

terialist values such as higher levels of democracy, the improvement of the environment, freedom of speech, and progression towards higher levels of rationality :

> "I think that the most important issue for Malta concerns the environment. Valleys are being spoiled to make way for houses, many cars have faulty exhaust pipes, and there is dirt everywhere. The government must be really severe here. Wardens should issue high fines". (Claire)

Such sentiments were strongest among the 'new' middle class with members being highly concerned with the maximisation of subjective well-being, and tolerance so that they held progressive outlooks on politics, work, family life, religion, and sexual behaviour. In line with their habitus of post-materialism, the NMC supported ethnic diversity, migration, women's issues, and gay/lesbian emancipation. Subjects were strongly in favour of the free mobility of persons, and thus, criticised policed state borders, visa restrictions, and the rise of the New Right.

Traditionalists and wealthy metropolitans were the only class factions that held 'deviant' political attitudes. Despite their position in the working class traditionalists still supported the NP and approved the various social policies enacted by the government. Wealthy metropolitans, on the other hand, joined the suburban blues and affluentials in holding strong materialist values. The reasons underlying such idiosyncratic sentiments can be located in their specific life histories. Traditionalists never worked in large assemblies and thus never held any attachment to others in similar work and market situations. Their personal relationship with employers and strict religiosity also motivated them not to perceive the differential distribution of class capital and their low standing in the social space as an injustice but as part of a natural system of inequality. Thus, traditionalists held a sincere belief in the qualities of the ascriptive elite to the extent that it was they voted for the NP. It can be easily deduced that it was thanks to the support of traditionalists that the NP have succeeded to remain in government since 1987. The disposition of wealthy metropolitans in favour of materialist ideals was the result of their life-course experience in business ventures which imbued them with a passionate interest in market-related issues at the expense of post-

materialist interests. Aware that their source of class power derived from their success in entrepreneurial ventures, they felt that a setback in the Maltese economy would also mean a decrease in their overall volume of class capital and the possibility to transform their economic capital into symbolic capital. Consequently, wealthy metropolitans joined the suburban blues and affluentials in championing materialist-oriented values and policies. However, they did disagree with suburban blues and affluentials on three different issues :

- First, they were not antagonistic towards the increasing number of refugees and illegal immigrants in Malta since these provided the opportunity to engage workers on lower wages (cheap labour).

- Secondly, they did not concur that the solution to economic downturns lies in the increasing of wages since, as entrepreneurs, this went directly against their commercial interests.

- Thirdly, wealthy metropolitans allied themselves with the NP and even supported Malta's accession in the EU. While the MLP is traditionally antagonistic towards rich entrepreneurial ventures, the EU facilitates the selling of commodities through the removal of all import and export tax in transactions between countries in this market. Moreover, it also provides the possibility of employing workers from Eastern Europe at relatively cheaper wages.

Two analytical questions are eminent at this point. The first relates to class voting : to what extent is class positioning and trajectory relevant to voting behaviour? That is, do individuals in similar class position and factions vote, more or less, in the same way? The second concerns class politics : are certain classes more likely to vote for the same parties? Class positioning and trajectory was very relevant to voting behaviour as classes and class factions tended to vote in similar ways. While the traditionalists, affluentials, the dominant class, 'new' middle class, and 'old' middle class factions voted for the NP, suburban blues and the déclassé supported the MLP. Many explained their choice by holding rationales that can be coded as 'material benefits' (e.g. "Labour was always there for workers. I know because I was a worker all my life" [Robert]) or

'class voting' "I vote Nationalist. Labour treated us [i.e. teachers] in an appalling manner during the 1980s" [Jacob]). Traditionalists rationalised their allegiance with the NP in a utilitarian manner : "[y]ou cannot bite the hand that feeds you. The NP was always a great source of employment opportunities" (Timothy). The fact that the Church in Malta was always a traditional ally of the NP served as another underlying motivating force underlying this union :

> "Labour is against the Church. The MLP leader not only had his marriage annulled despite having a daughter but is a self-proclaimed atheist. We cannot have prime ministers like that. The MLP would introduce divorce if elected. This is not good." (Ingrid).

However, class positioning and voting along the Left-Right continuum held a more complex relationship. To understand such swings in the patterns of political voting and attitudes one must recognise that citizens generally tend to blame and give credit to the ruling class when they experience downward and upward class mobility respectively. This was the case with the affluentials and déclassé :

> "In the past I used to be a strong supporter of the MLP. I considered both their opinions and policies as the best. Now I am more cautious. I do not agree with everything that [Eddie] Fenech Adami [then Prime minister of Malta and leader of the NP] says but I agree with him that joining the EU was the logical step for Malta. I will vote NP in the next election." (Oliver)

> "I used to have great faith in the NP after all the troubles and difficulties that we encountered during the Socialist era. Now we are back to square one. Although every imaginable object is available in the shops I do not afford anything. Even electricity/water and telephone bills are becoming difficult to pay." (Samuel).

While subjects in the traditionalist and affluentials class factions voted for the NP, the déclassé tended to vote labour (a party which traditionally has always been hostile to middle-class aspirations and pretensions). In the case of affluentials this occurred because their recent increase of economic class capital influenced them to change their alliance from the MLP to the NP since labour politics no longer appealed to their life situation. The opposite was the case with respect to the déclassé as their downward 'horizontal' mobility engendered a sharp disillusionment with liberal market politics. In the case of traditionalists, it has already been explained how their 'personalistic' relationships with subjects in the dominant class imbued them with a habitus of deference towards the *status quo*. In this respect, the deference hypothesis seems to be a more plausible explanation than embourgeoisement theory as why subjugated subjects vote and align themselves with conformist movements and parties. Traditionalists possessed a subordinate value system which accommodates widespread inequalities in a compromising frame of deference. Marxist rationales tend to ascribe a level of 'false consciousness' and 'alienation' amongst dissenters. Yet, such an outlook prioritises long-term aspirations with short-term ones when in everyday life the opposite is true.

Two key inferences can be proposed with respect to the triumvirate relationship between age, class and politics. First, that despite its pervasive character on its own 'age', does not seem to be enough to mobilise older persons into voting or organising themselves as a political bloc. Secondly, that contrary to theories which stipulated that there has been a decline in the influence of the class situation on individual action, data provides significant evidence for the continued salience of class on both class politics and voting.

**'Passing', 'covering', and class action**

This section examines the way that age and class, as bearers of symbolic value, held a key role in both the structuring of class action and in resisting age discrimination. This generally occurred as older persons attempt to 'pass' as younger or 'cover' their relatively advanced age as something of less consequence or even as desirable. One interesting finding was that subjects attempted to consolidate and improve their position in

the hierarchical class space by accentuating a 'youthful' self. This was generally achieved by constructing a younger middle-aged appearance and a 'busy body' ethic. This was perfectly understandable considering that, in general, people equate 'old' age with decease and decline : "old age is a disease, the symptoms of which are sagging, wrinkling, and graying - all of which are…symbols of a lack of control, which is unacceptable in contemporary society" (Jones and Pugh, 2005 : 254). Being 'old', in short, arises as a stigma in contemporary societies since it defers "something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier" (Goffman, 1963 : 1). Suburban blues, déclassé, and wealthy metropolitans - that is, class factions who experienced downward mobility following their transition into later life - were very active in masking their 'true' age. Jules insisted to perform all the odd jobs at home including risky ones such as going up the ladder to paint the house façade. He acknowledged that his insistence was not a question of not being to afford the hiring of workers but "not to let go". Jules resisted others' perception of himself as 'old' by projecting a younger body that is able to perform tasks as any other 'average' person. The déclassé were also extremely attentive not to adopt lifestyles that communicated a traditional orientation to ageing as they were aware that that this was equal to projecting an unattractive and asexual personality :

> "I do not like to look in the mirror and find myself looking at an old person. I try to dress accordingly. I try to look younger. [laughing] Is this wrong? [laughing] We do not go to bingo sessions or to senior centres. We do not want to be labelled as 'old'…We love going for weekend breaks to Gozo. We have a new honeymoon every four months or do [laughing]." (Gino)

Wealthy metropolitans also resisted being defined as 'old' since in entrepreneurial circles success and power were strongly equated with being middle-aged. They thus attempted to construct a younger self by refusing to break unhealthy habits such as drinking whiskey in the morning and smoking cigarettes and/or cigars. Striving to define oneself as 'not old' was attempted more vigorously by women than men since they felt scrutinised by the 'male gaze' as well as the 'youth gaze' :

> "I am afraid of becoming like old women…[pause]… [MF : What don't you like about becoming 'old'?] Well, they resemble men. Their face is no longer female, beautiful…I buy creams and stuff. Very expensive but one lives only once, don't you think? Hopefully they will diminish my wrinkles and make me lose weight." (Carol)

This data has a lot of parallels to studies which demonstrated how older women use 'masquerade' as a way of presenting their self to others. The concept of masquerade seems useful to help us understand how interrelations of class and age relations, within a classist and ageist society, may arise as a strategy towards the improvement of actors' positions in the social space. As Biggs (1999 : 75) argued, "in the deployment of the masque, youth becomes a normative state to which the body has to be restored". The problem with masquerade, however, is that it constrains 'younger' and 'older' ages as positive and negative sources of symbolic capital (respectively) when data showed that social life is more complex than that. The concept of 'passing' - that is, the "management of undisclosed discrediting information about self" to submerge "an attribute that is deeply discrediting" (Goffman, 1963 : 42) - is a more resourceful strategy to theorise the interrelation between age and class relations on the one hand, and class action on the other. The concept of 'passing' has been utilised by various gerontologists to describe how older persons strive to solicit a youthful 'gaze' and pass themselves as middle-aged. On must therefore take this idea further by highlighting the interlocking nature of class and age relations so as to understand how 'passing' as younger also arises as an instrument of class action. For example, Russell strove to pass as 'active' and 'fit' because he was aware that once he was labelled as 'old' his role in social networking would be taken less seriously. William was reluctant to give his true age because he was already finding his authority being seriously challenged in his factory which his children now operated. Being publicly labelled as an octogenarian would be, he believed, tantamount to a "death sentence". The inference here is that subjects attempted to pass as younger not simply to resist ageism *per se*, but as a reaction towards the fact that age victimisation functioned to close their access to material, cultural, and symbolic

forms of class capital. They struggled against ageism as a means to a class-related end.

It was the 'new' middle class [NMC] which were most successful in passing as middle-aged. Through their embracing of a third-age lifestyle the 'new' middle class were able to bridge middle age and later life without suffering the time-related constrains of either. This enabled them to strengthen their class position and experience upward mobility. They were proficient in projecting an image of themselves as 'retiring, but not expiring'. In practice, this was achieved by projecting themselves as 'autonomous', 'independent', and 'healthy' :

> "I follow low-fat recipes and walk a lot. I am fit and healthy… We do not like to depend on others, even if they have to be our children. Both my husband and I are very active, in both body and spirit. My cousin who lives down the road is 16 years younger but seems older than us. He has no interest in life. Although he is not well-educated, this is no excuse…" (Nina)

This excerpt demonstrates that the concept of passing is attractive to gerontological class research because both 'old age' and 'subordinated' class position tend to arise as a social stigma in contemporary times. As articulated by Kanuha,

> …[whether] among those who conceal the aging process by claiming to be younger than they are, or people who cannot read ordering food from pictures on restaurant menus, or battered women saying they bumped into doors to explain bruises, all of these people engage in hiding certain aspects of themselves…
>
> Kanuha, 1999 : 28

One problem with the notion of 'passing' was that it was unable to explain why individuals may, on the contrary, disclose their stigma to wider society so that they run the risk of adopting a discreditable and negative identity. However, this rarely happens as individuals only tend to 'come out' when they know that with impression management they

can make their stigma seem of less consequence, and even, turn it as a resource. This process is known as 'covering' (Goffman, 1963) which refers to the management of stigmatised identities. In 'covering', individuals adopt ritual or linguist techniques to cover their stigma as something else. This happens when the individual discloses to a larger group, thereby changing voluntary from discreditable to discredited, and instead manage the difficult social situation which this creates.

Two class factions who engaged strongly in the process of 'covering' constituted the 'old' middle class [OMC] and professional careerists since their particular habitus and higher-than-average levels of cultural capital crystallised well with the 'age-full' impressions of wisdom and knowledge. Women in these factions did not dye their hair but even flaunted its grey or white colour. Similarly, men dressed in a conservative manner by wearing not only a suit and tie but also by donning waistcoats and hats. Families styled their sitting-rooms in a refined but explicit traditional manner that made use of oak floors, doors and windows, together with magnificent staircases, balconies, and skylights. Indeed, the OMC and professional careerists were very eager to point out how their dominant position in their respective classes was not due to any political manoeuvres on their behalf, but a fair reflection of their extensive life experience :

> "Recently, I have been appointed as a mediator between the various committees who have a stake in the organisation of the village feast It is a very delicate job because people here are very sensitive. My advantage is that I am much older than [the people involved]. I knew their parents even before they were born. I remember most of them when they were toddlers". (Louis)

> "It was great to land the job of journal editor. It is flattering to be chosen despite that others, younger than myself, wanted the post too. Mind you, looking back it was not so surprising. I am not a young person and my experience was plentiful. I served under the British and four different Prime Ministers. I have a lot of experience." (André)

Subjects in middle and dominant classes utilised their class position in their attempts to resist age discrimination. Subjects claimed how they resisted and fought the stereotypical impression that older persons were generally dependent and marginalised by displaying their powerful class status. My interview transcripts with middle- and dominant-class subjects contain consistent references to husbands' ex-(prestigious) occupations and/or to the elite associations they were members in. This was performed to resist their master status of 'retiree' which, of course, functioned to decrease the symbolic capital held by older persons. Subjects disclosed how they manipulated their relatively superior class positions to resist age discrimination :

> "You cannot let people push you around. When this happens to me I generally look the person in the eye and tell him in a confident manner what I think of the whole situation. I can do this very effectively thanks to my background as a [paramedical] officer. I also act this way so that people notice that I am no average pensioner and that I mean business!". (Jacob)

This section demonstrated the interchange of class and age relations as actors go in pursuit of an improved position in the class space. Through the concepts of 'passing' and 'covering', it has become clearer how older persons succeed in manipulating their age-identity in their attempt to maintain and improve their position in the social space. These notions also highlight how class position is utilised to resist status inconsistencies as a result of age-related stereotypes, discrimination, and labelling. As Featherstone (1987) pointed out, there is a high level of interplay between bodies, age, and symbolic capital

Indeed, any study seeking to examine either class or age alone will be unable to arrive at a valid insight of class structuring and action following the retirement transition. After all, neither class- nor age-identities are something 'real'. Rather, they are continually created as an illusion through language, gestures, and all manners of symbolic signs which actors can manipulate and define according to their particular interests.

# 7

# CONCLUSION

## The persistence of class relations in later life

This book queried whether 'older persons, despite their estrangement from the productive process, are still dynamically engaged in class structuring and action'. Despite the fact that some gerontologists argue that 'class' is of less relevance to understand the lives of older persons, it ensues that class remains a key differentiating and oppressive factor in their lives. Although current older persons experience unprecedented levels of agency, they are not free to construct their own lives independently of class-related restraints. While the construction of positive ageing reflected the aspirations and values of the more dominant classes, the cultural and material resources needed to partake in games of consumption were inaccessible to 'subaltern' subjects. This implies strongly that, for a significant number of older people, "a move toward a consumer lifestyle seems only to promise further marginalisation as their engagement with society seems increasingly neither that of 'producer' nor 'consumer'" (Phillipson and Biggs, 1999 : 162).

Older persons were located in a multi-dimensional and hierarchical class space where position was contingent on their volume, composition, and trajectory of class capital. On a meta-analytical plane, older persons arrived at their class positions in the hierarchical space following a complex interplay between social structures and human agency on the one hand, and past experiences, present situations and future expectations on the other. This occurred as subjects internalised the external processes that lead to aspirations and tastes that define their class habitus. In line with Bourdieu's (1984 : 57) sociology of class, lifestyles emerged as the "strongest barriers between the classes" with "aesthetic stances…like cosmetics, clothing and home decoration [utilised as] opportunities to experience and assert one's position in social space". This was even true for those subjects holding omnivorous dispositions of cultural capital as

they manipulated their familiarity with a range of cultural styles to legitimate their position in the hierarchical class space.

Contrary to conventional assumptions which presuppose that class mobility cannot occur in later life unless retirees re-enter the labour market, class formation in later life does not run parallel to that found in late adulthood. As both the theoretical and empirical discussions demonstrated, occupations are not 'sociological' classes as such but only proxy measures to cross-tabulate different categories of older persons by their respective resources. While older subjects may undergo 'vertical' upward mobility when they experience some increase of their volume of class capital, 'horizontal' upward mobility is also possible when individuals find their class capital to resonate well with the coming of a late modern society. On the other hand, whilst 'vertical' downward mobility is experienced by subjects whose class capital has no value outside the occupational sphere, 'horizontal' vertical mobility results when subjects experience a sharp decline in their symbolic capital due to ageist forms of exclusion. Here, it is important to claim that although class mobility occurs largely 'within' rather than 'across' classes, class formation remains alive and kicking in later life.

Gilleard and Higgs' (2000, 2002) argument that class in later life is eclipsed by generational forms of solidarity seems to be unjustified. Their case has to be questioned for misjudging the coupling between consumption and early adulthood in older persons' lives, and thus, ignoring how 'generationing' results from the experience of a lifetime. Truly, older persons were not, by and large, conscious class actors with strongly, collective, class-based beliefs. This, however, should not be taken as meaning that they hold no or very weak levels of class identity. The rising hegemony of middle-class in contemporary industrial societies function so that working-class culture has become increasingly pathologised. Modes of individualization, hence, have become essentially related to modes of class identity rather than a departure from them. Class identifications in later life arise from a multitude of forces, some structural and others subjective, and which effect different people diversely. The differences expressed in dis-identifications, and emotional feelings emerging from subjects' class positions, can be taken as evidence of the strong presence of class identities in later life.

The presence of class demonstrated that standpoints predicting the mobilisation of older persons as a political class remain unfounded. Although all subjects faced increasing age discrimination as they grew older, age relations neither eradicated nor overshadowed class inequalities. Subjects' lifelong experiences in class-related social arenas engendered an unconscious level of class identification from which they found it very difficult to dissociate. Despite the coming of a 'third age' camaraderie, daily living in later life still continued to occur across class patterns of association. Moreover, in recent years class struggle in later life has become characterised by the ascendancy of 'individualised' and 'culturalist' forms of class struggle. Three main ways of class practice were dominant - namely, (a) utilising consumption practices to construct powerful symbols about status, wealth and power differences, (b) manipulating their place in bridging and bonding social networks to reinforce class reproduction and exclusion, and (c), manoeuvring their place in age and class relations to utilise their class power to resist age discrimination or highlighting their age to legitimate their class position..

It also results that the debate over whether the family or the individual is the most appropriate 'unit' of analysis is miscast. People are distributed to class spaces according to processes that are powerfully shaped by gender so that it is the 'structuring of opportunities' - rather than individuals or families as such - that constitutes the key concern of class analysis. Indeed, the 'women' problem in class analysis is ultimately a practical issue with the choice of approach depending on the phenomena and aim/objectives under study. For instance, when the concern is to provide a map of the class structure or with gender inequality in labour markets, the individual is by far the most appropriate unit of analysis. On the other hand, when the focus is on those aspects of stratification or class system that are linked to the pooling of resources and the sharing of material assets then it is best to deal with the 'family' as the unit of analysis. This was articulated well by Marshall et al. :

> …classes comprise neither families nor individuals but individuals in families. It is for this reason, therefore, that the study of class is properly conducted at different levels of analysis. In this way, the collective effects of women's limited access to economic and social power on the re-

> production of positions within the structure can be explained, as well as the complex determination of life-chances accruing to individuals in conjugal units.
>
> Marshall et al., 1988 : 85

Hence, there is no universal solution as whether researchers should appoint the individual or family as the unit of class analysis. This dilemma is, ultimately, a methodological one and it is best resolved on the basis of the particular aim and objectives of the study on the one hand, and the empirical setting on the other.

**Contributions and limitations**

This book holds four distinct contributions to the sociology of class and social gerontology. First, it problematised the assumption that class is of declining relevance in later life. Despite their experience of retirement, and even though they find it difficult to articulate their thoughts and feelings about class, older persons' antennae remain remarkably sensitive to the power and suffering arising from the reproduction of class inequalities. Secondly, it sensitised the field of class research to the realms of later life. It refuted the conventional claims that the class position of older persons is contingent on final occupations and that class formation in later life runs in parallel to that in late adulthood. Moreover, it questioned the assumptions that no class mobility is possible unless retirees re-enter the labour market and that widows' class locations are simply appendages of their late husbands' class positions. Thirdly, the book bridged gerontology with Bourdieu's contributions to critical sociology. This link was extremely pertinent as it highlighted how older persons' lives differ according to past, present, and anticipatory pressures. It also pointed how class structuring and action in later life is based upon everyday, informal, and micro-political competitions. Finally, it also succeeded in re-conceptualising class research from a life-course perspective. This succeeded in resolving the 'conventional' and 'malestream' biases in class research by treating class trajectories as arising from historical locations, linked lives, timing of lives, and human agency.

The project, however, includes a number of potential and certain limitations. One must consider that the methodological resolutions surely af-

fected the structure and shape of the emergent class divisions. Decisions regarding the design and construction of the life-history interviews had a direct impact on the book's outcome. Moreover, caution should be exercised in the generalisation of the analysis and interpretation of data since the latter was collected in a special socio-historical context. The contemporary Maltese social fabric is influenced by the presence of a socialist regime for a total of sixteen years (1971-1987) which implies that the remaking of new social, political, and economic conditions are closer to the experience of Eastern European states than those of our Western counterparts. The consequences of a history of colonisation cannot be neglected since every colonial legacy spills over to a variety of behaviour patterns. These include a 'welcoming society' orientation as well as an educational, legal, and general institutional set-up which draws heavily on British metropolitan practices. The interests of the Church in Malta are also highly represented in both the 'official' and 'unofficial' realms of daily life, with the parish priest remaining a strong representative of village and community interests. Suffice to say that Malta, along with the Philippines, are the only countries in the world where divorce is illegal. Malta is also a micro-state which generates a number of leitmotifs that are absent in the typical European state. These include high levels of social visibility, a dense psycho-social atmosphere, and monopolies in areas of expertise where sometimes only one person equals the society's total sum requirement of proficiency.

**Looking to the future**

The understanding of gerontological relations will benefit immensely from the carrying out of a critical ethnographic study. Apart from complementing this investigation, a critical ethnographic study has a stronger potential to tackle daily consumption as a class activity, investigate the social-psychological burdens of class-related anxiety, understand class identity as a sense of one's place in a cultural economy of meaning, and focus on the micro-politics of class relations. After all, microsituational encounters can be perceived as the ground zero of all social action and sociological evidence, with field research having the potential to shed light on both the external and internal structures of same- and cross-class encounters. Therefore, critical ethnographic study has the potential to

problematise the loose and simplistic ways in which 'agency' is studied : "choice is a problem to be analyzed, not an accomplishment to be asserted…[w]hat is always measured in such discussions is behaviour, and it is simply presumed that behaviour is based on choice" (Dannefer and Uhlenberg, 1999 : 312). The ethnographical standpoint is also especially attractive when one considers that subjects were discursively disabled from talking about class, and that the focus of class research in late modernity must be on the cultural politics of class.

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## Subject and Name Index