The Symbolic Economy of Authenticity as a Form of Symbolic Violence: The Case of Middle-class ethnic minorities

Ori Schwarz
Bar-Ilan University

Abstract
While authenticity has become a main axiological principle in late-modernity, a desired good and token of worth, studies from different countries indicate inequality in access to authenticity: middle-class ethnic minorities often face difficulties being recognized as authentic and experiencing themselves as such. This phenomenon is discussed below in terms of symbolic violence. While doing this the article makes several theoretical contributions: (1) Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence is historicized. Different forms of symbolic violence (pre-modern, modern and late-modern) are distinguished, each relying on a unique cosmology, logic and symbolic economy. (2) Different strategies employed by social theorists to theorize authenticity are discussed and compared to reveal a gap between common understandings of authenticity as the dispositional depth of action and the misrecognized principle that often informs the ascription of authenticity, i.e. faithfulness to established discursive categories. Discursive structures allow members of hegemonic groups to naturalize cultural exploration and self-transformation as authentic self-realization, whereas even second-generation middle-class ethnic minorities often have their classed dispositions suspected as inauthentic. Some eventually understand themselves as inauthentic; while others invest in late acquisition of low-brow culture in order to gain authenticity, thus contributing to their own subjection. (3) Cultural schemes may thus exert symbolic violence even if they cannot be traced back to strategic action of their privileged beneficiaries.

Keywords
Authenticity, Bourdieu, middle-class, discourse, ethnicity, recognition, symbolic violence

Symbolic violence is a highly effective theoretical notion: it brings together a wide spectrum of apparently very different phenomena and social mechanisms and reveals their similarities, thus offering a systematic theory of domination. For Bourdieu, domination always relies on the complicity of the dominated. This complicity is never truly voluntary (here Bourdieu departs from Weber's legitimation theory), neither does it lie in merely false consciousness à la Marx. Instead, complicity is embodied. Symbolic violence consists in all mechanisms, through which the dominated (of capitalism, sexism, colonialism etc.) contribute to their own subjection through their own desires, emotions, sentiments, bodily reactions and judgements. Complicity is affected by categories of perception, classification and evaluation imposed on the dominated against their interests. Deliberately underplaying historical differences allowed Bourdieu to reveal these shared dynamics of power. However, having brought together these sundry phenomena, we may gain from refining our understanding of symbolic violence by making finer distinctions between mechanisms of domination that follow different logics and by tracking their historical evolution.

Bourdieu suggested that members of dominated groups often contribute to their own subjection while recognizing arbitrary axiological standards of beauty, intelligence and elegance under which they are deemed unworthy. This article explores standards of authenticity (that classify some as inauthentic and hence unworthy, but as shown below, constitute a different symbolic economy), while using Bourdieu's analysis as a point of reference for comparison.

For the last half a century, authenticity has apparently become an increasingly significant source of dignity, social value, and moral orientation for people throughout the world: sociologists and anthropologists
have documented how authenticity increasingly orients action in various life spheres, including sexuality (Bernasconi 2010), mourning (Collier 1997; Schwarz 2013; Wilce 2009), education (Reay 2002), career decisions (Hoey 2006; Vannini & Burgess 2009), and consumption (Grigsby 2004; Zukin 2008). Self-authenticity has become 'warrant for self-claims to moral life' (Weigert 2009, 39), and the will to live authentically turned into a master-motive that shapes modes of action and self-evaluation (Weigert 2009). While sceptical about authenticity’s ontic status, sociologists are interested in the social implications of authenticity as an emerging ethical/interpretive framework. This emphatically modern ethic, whose rise is often associated with Rousseau and Herder, demands that individuals find out their true nature, emotions and beliefs and stick to them; act spontaneously and uncalculatedly; and remain true to themselves despite external pressures to conform to social norms and temptations to 'sell out', i.e. subordinate authenticity to instrumental rationality (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005; Taylor 1991; Weigert 2009). Finally, authenticity turned into an axiological principle used to evaluate other people’s moral and social worth.

As these literatures demonstrate, late-modern subjects often share a desire to feel authentic and be recognized as such. However, they are not equally likely to fulfill this desire. For some actors, the quest for authenticity may open-up a wide range of practices and lifestyles that are all likely to be recognized as authentic ‘self-realization’. Others have a much narrower range at their disposal. For members of some groups, ‘legitimate culture’ (middle-class practices and tastes that grant their owners privileges: Bourdieu 1984) may be considered ‘inauthentic’ almost a priori.

A case in point is ‘Ashkenazification’. Israelis use this word to describe an alleged phenomenon of ethnic passing, deceptive mimicry in which Mizrahim (Jews of Middle-Eastern descent) ‘behave like Ashkenazim’ (Jews of European descent, Israel’s hegemonic ethnic group), while being ‘estranged from their “authentic selves”’ (Sasson-Levy and Shoshana 2013). However, this lay account has several problems: as demonstrated below, empirical data show that Mizrahim are usually accused of ‘Ashkenazification’ for demonstrating tastes and practices which are currently typical of Israel’s educated upper-middle class, and which most Ashkenazim do not share. Furthermore, accusations of inauthentic Ashkenazification are also directed at second-generation middle-class Mizrahim, who are accused of passing over their class culture without having engaged in any mimetic self-transformation. Middle-class Mizrahim are thus at higher risk of having their authenticity challenged.

This is not an exceptional case. Studies from various national contexts show that middle-class ethnic minorities often have difficulties feeling authentic and gaining recognition of their counter-stereotypical behaviours and performances as authentic (Archer 2012; Harris 2013; Patillo-McCoy 1999; Rollock et al. 2013). My theorization below was prompted by this recurrent empirical finding.

This article has two aims: first, to identify and explain inequalities in access to recognized and experienced authenticity, while focussing on the case of middle-class ethnic minorities (i.e. non-hegemonic groups). I discuss cases from the USA, the UK and Israel while focussing on the latter. For this purpose I explore the principles that organize the ascription of authenticity, the way authenticity relates to social and cultural structures, and the common misconstruction of these relations. In particular, I discuss the discursive racialization of class and class culture, due to which ethnic minorities have their classed tastes, dispositions, and life-styles denied recognition as authentic and find it harder to capitalize on them.

The article’s second aim is to discuss this pattern as an emerging type of symbolic violence and use it to revise and elaborate the theoretical notion of symbolic violence. This is more than a scholastic question of classification: an analysis of authenticity as symbolic violence may debunk the emancipatory claims of the authenticity discourse, which are often reproduced in scholarly accounts (e.g. Giddens 1994, Taylor 1991). Middle-class minorities might internalize suspicions of their authenticity; understand their own dispositions as mimetic and inauthentic; or even avoid ‘legitimate’ cultural practices in order to regain authenticity. Having embodied this arbitrary (yet naturalized) construction of authenticity in their emotions, shames and desires, they contribute to their own subjection. While acknowledging the value of authenticity and the arbitrary principles organizing its distribution, they contribute to their construction as subjects lacking social value.

No less importantly, understanding inequality in access to authenticity in terms of symbolic violence allows us to compare it with earlier forms of symbolic violence, and thus historicize this theoretical notion while pointing at elective affinities between shifting cosmologies and economies of worth and shifting forms of symbolic violence. The empirical cases discussed below also push theory forward by suggesting that symbolic violence is not necessarily agentic, that is, exerted by its beneficiaries.

Anthias (2012) urged students of intersectionality not to restrict themselves to intersections of mutually-reinforcing disadvantaged positions. Indeed, middle-class ethnic minorities, positioned at the
intersection of privilege and disadvantage, are subjected to unique forms of symbolic violence. Paying empirical attention to these forms may enrich sociological theory.

The next two sections historicize symbolic violence by distinguishing between three different forms of symbolic violence and comparing them. The following two sections explore the misrecognized sources of experienced and recognized authenticity and of unequal access to naturalization. I then discuss empirical findings on the authenticity of ethnic minorities in different national contexts (Israel, USA, and the UK). Finally, I address the theoretical implications of these findings.

Types of symbolic violence

While Bourdieu made a universal claim regarding the symbolic dimension of all forms of domination, particular mechanisms of symbolic violence are embedded within particular moral cosmologies. The three forms of symbolic violence presented below represent three historical eras, although all three still persist today.

The first form (hereafter, SV1) consists in making the dominated experience their group's dominated position as natural. It is a remnant of pre-modern cosmology, in which intergroup hierarchies were still doxic (i.e., did not demand explicit legitimation). The second type (henceforth SV2) consists in allegedly-universal (although biased) evaluation schemes and criteria, in which members of dominated groups are doomed to be considered worthless qua individuals. SV2 may be viewed as a response to the liberal, individualist and egalitarian cosmology developed since the 17th-18th centuries and the new need to address evaluation at individuals rather than groups and justify hierarchies by relying on abstract quasi-universal 'principles of equivalence' (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, Boltanski 2011). The shift from SV1 to SV2 parallels the shift from simple to complex domination (Boltanski 2011), from honour to esteem (Honneth 1995).

One example of SV1 is the romantic preference of women for older and taller men (Bourdieu 2001, 35-6). Here members of a dominated group (women) internalize a scheme of desires and emotions that contributes to their own subjection (reproducing gender asymmetries) simply by desiring 'security' and 'maturity' which they associate with older and taller men; and by feeling that shorter and younger men are inappropriate mates. Gender hierarchy is experienced as natural. Similarly, women may feel that their honour relies on the gendered unequal division of labour, so that being assisted by their husbands in domestic labour (considered unfit for men) would lower not only their husbands but also themselves (ibid.). Importantly, SV1 does not consist of universal evaluation principles (men and women are evaluated according to different evaluation principles) that justify social hierarchy. What women internalize is not pseudo-universal principles but naked hierarchy: their bare dominated status, visually demonstrated by height differences and embodied in their patterned romantic desires.

Contrarily, SV2 relies on allegedly universal 'virtues', notions such as intelligence, beauty and elegance, which are actually shaped to valorize particular groups and ensnare others who recognize their alleged universality. Bourdieu claimed that schools inculcate in peasant and working-class children recognition of the allegedly universal value of intelligence and elegance, without offering them access to these symbolic goods. Schools teach children to fetishize desired attributes, i.e. misrecognize these social inheritances as justly rewarded natural virtues. Going to school for the promise of better life-chances, they end-up contributing to their own demoralization and devaluation, learning to see themselves through their oppressors' eyes, internalize their stigmatization and accept their casting into dominated social roles (Bourdieu 1993, 1996; Bourdieu & Passeron 1990). SV2 often produces shame, an embodied experience, experienced whenever people internalize a standard without gaining the capacity to live up to it (Sayer 2005), e.g. when Black women internalize the arbitrary Euro-American beauty ideal or when provincials internalize the inferior status of their dialect.

While using these virtues as evaluation criteria obviously privileges particular groups, these criteria are employed individually, ascribing value to individuals by placing them on continua, not by merely classifying them. Unlike SV1, SV2 claims to engage in democratic, meritocratic evaluation of individuals for their traits and achievements (Honneth called it the 'universalization' and 'abstraction' of traditional group honour: 1995, 125-230), even though these criteria are shaped by symbolic struggles and intergroup power asymmetries.

In SV1 the dominated groups experience their subjection as essential to their ascribed identity. It relies on cosmological hierarchies: women should occupy a dominated position qua women, not for any of their individual flaws: unlike peasants who feel ashamed of their rural accent, women may be proud to be
feminine, yet experience their dominated position as natural. Contrariwise, SV2 is strongly related to the symbolic economy of liberal capitalism, in which worth is associated less with ascribed categories and more with acquired cultural features. This is a model of 'possessive individualism' (Skeggs 2004), in which people invest in acquiring value through self-transformation and acquisition of valuable features ('cultural capital').

In this symbolic economy, brilliantly portrayed in Distinction (Bourdieu 1984), class is euphemized and legitimated as status. Arbitrary cultural features (dispositions, tastes, personal traits, worldviews, practices, material objects and body-techniques) are constructed as valuable, mainly for being associated with the dominant. High-status groups have the symbolic power to valorize and fetishize their lifestyles, make them seem inherently worthy. This dynamic is typically modern: pace Weber, Bourdieu claimed that status did not decline and gave way to class; instead, class reproduction became increasingly mediated by status (and hence, by culture). Lifestyle gains importance under Simmelian urban anonymity, where for lack of personal familiarity people must rely on external signs (fashion and demeanour) to infer identities and classify strangers. This modern social semiotics engendered a symbolic economy, in which dominant groups could determine the relative worth of different styles. SV2 makes dominated groups experience the cultural features they have inherited as inherently inferior to 'legitimate' culture. While members of the dominant classes acquire legitimate culture through unconscious mimesis, the dominated must work hard to gain partial mastery of it as a 'second language'. Hardly ever can they capitalize on legitimate capital to the same degree as its inheritors.

However, once recognized as worthy and once eventually acquired, cultural features have a stable objective existence as tokens of value. Legitimate culture can thus grant value indiscriminately to anyone who has properly acquired it. In this sense, these cultural features truly operate as 'capital', that is, congealed labour (investment in the acquisition of culture) in an exchangeable and accumulable form within the possessive self. Like other currencies, their value does not depend on the identity of its owner. Instead, it relies on the social production of scarcity (valuable dispositions are usually rare and are hard to acquire).

Different forms of symbolic violence evoke different reactions from the dominated. SV1 consists in an embodied sense of knowing one's place in a traditional honour cosmology. It thus encourages the dominated to stick to their unique group features and social roles. Contrariwise, SV2 relies on the liberal false promises of social mobility, equal opportunity, and unbiased, universal evaluation standards (the 'ideology of natural gifts and individual merits' as mere 'democratic facade' legitimating inherited privileges: Bourdieu 1996, 373). Hence, it encourages members of the dominated group to aspire status in terms of the hegemonic evaluation standards; and arouses feelings of shame, as those who fail to become worthy subjects in these arbitrary standards misrecognize the structural source of failure and attribute it to their individual innate inadequacy (lack of intelligence, beauty etc.) or their lack of adequate effort and 'diligence'.

Despite apparent logical contradiction, SV1 and SV2 can work in tandem: for Fanon (1986) Blacks may simultaneously internalize epidermal/racial hierarchies and recognize white culture as a universal measure to be imitated. This may arouse (usually failed) corporeal mimetic attempts, such as the colonial subject imitating a British accent and hexis (Bourdieu 2001, 59); and the female CEO or politician emulating the masculine low voice pitch associated with authority (Oakley 2000).

Bourdieu maintained that only rarely (at times of subversive revolt) can the dominated thoroughly reject the evaluation standards imposed upon them (e.g. through identity politics struggles for recognition such as 'black is beautiful' (Bourdieu 2001, 119)). Even then revolts are unlikely to impose their alternative criteria on wider society. Thus, Bourdieu leaves the dominated only two viable coping strategies: individual efforts to assimilate that only reiterate the dominant values (Sasson-Levy and Shoshana 2013), or maintaining 'loyalty to self and the group' (as in the condemnation of acting white: Fordham and Ogbu 1986) which is 'always liable to relapse into shame' (Bourdieu 1984, 384).

Bourdieu was motivated by the desire to dismantle SV2 by revealing the arbitrariness of cultural hierarchies; by uncovering the strong statistical correlations between cultural dispositions and objective social positions; and by unmasking the interestedness of cultural hierarchies and their contribution to the reproduction and legitimation of inequality.

Outside academia, in the political sphere, identity politics has struggled to revalorize cultural features associated with low-status groups. As Sayer (2005) suggested, against SV2 one may demand either equal access to valorized culture, or revaluation, that is, re-distribution of symbolic capital. Like Bourdieu's critique, such politics have assumed that once a cultural feature (a musical style, accent, or worldview) is valorized, it can confer value on its owner fairly indiscriminately: valorization struggles only make sense if—like currencies—cultural traits have fixed value independently of their owners. However, as demonstrated below, this assumption no longer holds under the symbolic economy of authenticity.
Analysing, criticizing and fighting this emerging form of symbolic violence thus necessitate new strategies.

**SV3: the dark side of authenticity**

Against this background I wish to portray the emergence of a third distinct kind of symbolic violence (SV3). Like its two predecessors, SV3 is a symbolic-discursive structure that prevents members of dominated groups from attaining socially recognized value while relying on their unwitting collaboration. However, SV3 is rooted in a distinct symbolic economy that has emerged in late modernity, the symbolic economy of authenticity. This term implies more than simply saying that recognized authenticity is an axiological principle or that authenticity has a market value (as in Grazian's account of blues clubs, which remains within the symbolic economy of distinction: Grazian 2003): it implies a unique regime of value that follows its own rules and logic of evaluation, neither relying on quasi-universal principles of equivalence, nor reverting to pre-modern explicit group hierarchy.

Philosophers, sociologists and other scholars have studied the rise and evolution of authenticity as an ethical and axiological principle in modern societies ever since Rousseau, and identified (among other things) its potential to challenge established social and cultural hierarchies as artificial and arbitrary; the evolution of the concept of authenticity throughout the last two centuries; and the differences between sincerity and authenticity ethics (e.g. Boltanski & Chiapello 2005; Meyer 2000; Taylor 1991; Weigert 2009). Unlike sincerity, authenticity is subjected to the modern hermeneutics of suspicion (Ricoeur 1970), as people may fail to recognize whether they are authentic.

Authenticity, like ascribed identity in SV1 and high culture in SV2, operates as an axiological principle: actors may be granted or denied recognition as socially and morally worthy individuals, depending on the perceived authenticity of their conduct and lifestyle. While lifestyles as such are sometimes accused of inauthenticity (especially high-status ones: Schwarz 2016), it should be stressed that in the symbolic economy of authenticity social practices do not have a fixed value independently of the identity of their carrier. Engagement with the very same cultural practice may grant value to some social actors (for whom it is recognized as authentic), while devaluing others (for whom it is not). Ascription of inauthenticity (SV3) denigrates people based on neither their ascribed identity alone (as in SV1) nor on their embodied performance alone (as in SV2, when the unnatural performance of parvenus betrays the inadequacy) but on the relation between these two levels and their consistency with discursive categories.

While under SV1 the dominated experience their domination as a sense of positioning naturally deriving from their ascribed identity, and in SV2 they experience it as deriving from their failure to comply with allegedly universal evaluation criteria—in SV3 the dominated experience legitimate culture as authentic for the dominant and for them alone.

The authenticity discourse allows the owners of symbolic capital to oscillate between contradicting accusation against the dominated: either they are being too authentic; or not authentic enough. In the first case they are constituted as worthless by SV2, as carriers of authentic culture that lacks legitimacy; in the latter, they embody value by accumulating cultural capital, but destroy their claim for moral value as authentic persons, as value is alienated from its owners. Thus, inequality in access to recognized authenticity may enhance and aggravate the effect of inequality in mastery of 'legitimate' culture.

The notion of authenticity inherently contradicts universalism and equality: it assumes that what is natural for some people is foreign to others, that practices and ways of life which deserve praise among the former are despicable among the latter. However, criticizing authenticity necessitates uncovering its misconceived structural sources.

**Authenticity and social structure**

In Bourdieu's accounts, naturalization and mystification are crucial components of symbolic violence (e.g. Bourdieu 2000): under the ideology of meritocracy, academic distinction is ascribed to natural merit rather than to structural position (Bourdieu 2008, 186). The ideology of authenticity invites a similar analysis. Feeling authentic and being recognized as such are widely desired goods, whose structural principles of distribution usually remain misconceived.

How is authenticity positioned vis-à-vis social structure? Sociological literature offers three main answers. The first considers authenticity a particular orientation of action that disembeds actors from social structure, a form of agency. The second defines authenticity as action's dispositional depth, an embodiment of social structure. Finally, authenticity may derive from discursive cultural structures capable of transforming social structure and enhancing inequality by exercising symbolic violence.
Authenticity is often conceptualized as a Weberian action orientation, in which reflexive introspection motivates action: authentic action is allegedly based on knowing and being true to one's emotions, uniqueness and spontaneity. Here authenticity has an anti-structural potential as it allows actors to ignore both group norms and expected future benefits and follow their inner voice. Authenticity is a central component of Giddens' (1994) 'reflexivity' and Lasch's (1979) 'narcissism'. Taylor (1991) famously claimed that unlike pre-moderns, moderns no longer turn to their structural position to find out their identity and social value but turn their gaze inwards. Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) claimed that evolving cultural ideals of authenticity (first sincerity, later uniqueness, and finally autotelicity) have enabled actors to criticize and transform social structure (motivating the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism). However, Giddens and Boltanski focussed on civilizational questions (how the cultural ideal of authenticity has transformed society as a whole), not distributional ones. Cultural ideals cannot be truly anti-structural: as axiological principles they organize critique and praise, creating hierarchies, winners and losers. As shown below, some people are less likely to feel authentic and be recognized as such, despite reflexively striving for self-realization. Furthermore, what people find while looking inwards (and whether these identities can gain external affirmation) is not arbitrary, but patterned according to structural positions.

Dispositional accounts, common among laypersons and sociologists alike, suggest that authenticity is the dispositional depth of action, its embeddedness in embodied social structure. Action is allegedly (experienced and recognized as) authentic if grounded in deep dispositions (those innate or inculcated early in life), in who one really is. These accounts are antithetical to Giddens': rather than a disembedding, anti-structural form of agency, authentic action is action that reproduces structure, in which actors stick to the structural positions to which they were socialized. When laypersons accuse others of inauthenticity, they usually assume them to be trying to transform or conceal these lasting dispositions, the core of their 'true' selves, and imitate higher status groups for instrumental reasons. Thus, middle-class practices of ethnic minorities are believed to derive from instrumental mimesis rather than reflexive self-realization (Sasson-Levy and Shoshana 2013). This folk notion is much in line with Bourdieu's dispositional theory. For Bourdieu (1984) late acquisition of habits and dispositions is always partial and distinguishable from early acquisition through unconscious mimesis. The bodies of parvenus betray their inauthenticity through the minutiae of conduct; petit-Bourgeois pretensions are easy to distinguish from the natural ease of the Bourgeoisie, as the pretentious mimic external practices but lack dispositional depth (Bourdieu 1984).

Even subjective feeling of authenticity may rely on dispositional depth: for Lahire (2003; 2011), people experience mental plights whenever they cannot fully realize their (multiple, often-contradictory) dispositions through action. Those who have acquired conflicting dispositions in eclectic social contexts (e.g. social climbers) are most likely to feel the 'gap between what the social world objectively allows us to "express" at a given moment and what it has put in us during our past socialization' (Lahire 2003, 354), i.e. inauthenticity.

Dispositional accounts are highly appealing: they offer powerful sociological explanations without straying significantly from lay understanding. However, they leave us puzzled by much empirical data. For example, they cannot explain why middle-class Afro-Americans may feel inauthentic for being who they are, and invest in late acquisition of 'ghetto' style in order to gain authenticity (Harris 2013; Patillo-McCoy 1999). It also remains unclear why the middle-classness of ethnic minorities is often refused recognition as authentic, even if they are second and third generation middle-class, private school graduates whose middle-class habitus, the only cultural repertoire available to them, embodies their structural position (Archer 2011, 2012; Harris 2013; Schwarz 2014). Dispositional depth alone cannot account for the experience and recognition of authenticity.

A possible way out of the puzzle is asking how authenticity is related to discursive, cultural structures. I suggest we conceptualize authenticity as faithfulness to discursive categories, an effect of cultural-discursive structure (classification system), which despite mutual influences remains analytically distinguished from social structure. Being recognized as authentic and feeling authentic is thus a privilege of 'individuals whose attributes correspond to their socially defined identities', those for whom 'there exists a collectively recognized social identity corresponding to the [objective position they occupy]' (Boltanski 1987, 296); those who 'conform to an idealized representation of reality', to a 'set of expectations' about their category (Grazian 2003, 10). A personal eclectic mix of dispositions and attributes may be considered inauthentic not for any internal contradictions (as Lahire suggested), but simply for having no name, no 'collectively recognized representation' (Boltanski 1987, 295). Middle-class ethnic minorities are usually denied this privilege for their counter-stereotypical position, for which no discursive category exists. Discursive categories are also the building blocks of ontological narratives, through which people construct
or challenge their own authenticity: people create these autobiographic stories by aligning autobiographical details with collective discursive categories and public narratives (Lawler 1999, Somers 1994).

While 'attributes' associated with 'socially defined identities' may well be corporeal, they grant their carriers authenticity not for corresponding to their 'deep' embodied dispositions but for combining into a whole that corresponds to a pre-given discursive category. Being recognized as 'authentic to oneself' always covertly refers to being 'an authentic X', a personal variation on an ideal-type. Demonstrating a highly eclectic, incoherent and unclassifiable set of attributes is likely to be considered inauthentic just as its opposite—unpersonalized perfect enactments of stereotype, like Sartre's garçon de café (1992, 101f).

Accounts in the literature from the USA, UK and Israel (which are briefly reviewed below) indicate that laypersons often misrecognize the centrality of discursive categories in the production of authenticity, believing authenticity to be attributed based on faithfulness to dispositions and introspection alone. While these different countries differ in their histories, cultural understandings, and realities of class and ethnicity, the similarities I identify in the literature on middle-class ethnic minorities are striking. In all cases, authenticity is a privilege challenged among (although not always completely denied of) middle-class ethnic minorities for their counter-stereotypical position, for which no discursive category exists. Indeed, in any society there have been social categories not open for anyone to take. Yet, when middle-class Afro-Americans, British-Caribbeans or Israeli-Mizrahim are blamed for 'acting white' or being 'inauthentic', they are not blamed for disobeying external rules regarding which social positions are open to whom. On the contrary: they are blamed for allegedly not following their true selves, acting without dispositional depth, not realizing their freedom to spontaneously 'be themselves'. The authenticity ethic defends old ethnic divisions-of-labour and unequal distributions of styles and identities in those liberal societies that formally reject overt ethno-racial discrimination.

This may explain why some individuals are more likely to invest in acquiring new tastes, lifestyles and dispositions, and still experience it as an authentic Giddensian project of self-realization: experienced authenticity (just like recognized authenticity) relies on shared discursive classifications.

While attempting to explain why attending higher education threatens working-class people's sense of authenticity, Reay (2002) suggested that notions of authenticity are classed: while working-class subjects have a 'Heideggerian' notion of authenticity as faithfulness to one's past, middle-class subjects have a 'Taylorian' sense of authenticity as self-realization. This difference allegedly accounts for inequality in access to authenticity. It should be noticed however that even an ideal of authenticity as self-realization cannot naturalize just any self-transformation (even for middle-class students, some paths of self-transformation would be considered deceptive mimicry). The authenticity ideal always demands faithfulness to one's true self (who one has always been, even unknowingly), while allowing certain (although unequal) leeway to interpret the new as old. This faithfulness to oneself may be realized through either self-transformation or avoiding it, depending on the case and on discursive constructions of ethnic and class identities. Thus, while Reay ascribes the injuries of authenticity to differential understandings of authenticity, I stress the commonalities these understandings share. It is this shared notion of authenticity that harms non-hegemonic groups.

**Unequal access to naturalization**

The symbolic economy of authenticity is especially detrimental for middle-class ethnic minorities, since while the distribution of tastes and dispositions is strongly classed, discursive constructions of authenticity are often racialized. Middle-class ethnic minorities often have deeply ingrained middle-class tastes and dispositions, but are expected to demonstrate lower-class dispositions to be recognized as authentic (Harris 2013; Schwarz 2014). Discursive classifications can neither faithfully represent internal dispositions, nor can they fully shape them in their own image. The authenticity ethic may thus encourage middle-class ethnic minorities to engage in self-transformation and acquire lower-class cultural repertoires, or penalize them for failing to do so.

Contrariwise, for members of hegemonic ethnic groups late acquisition of legitimate culture may be recognized as authentic development or 'realization' of their true selves. Experimenting with new ('metrosexual') forms of masculinity, enrolling in university, or starting to listen to classical music or visit the theatre without former acquaintance with these cultural forms (all mentioned in the literature as indicating inauthenticity among ethnic minorities) are more likely to be recognized as self-realization for members of hegemonic ethnic groups. By challenging the moral legitimacy of non-hegemonic groups to
engage with these cultural forms, the authenticity ethic reinforces ethnic inequality.

Judith Butler (1993) taught us that all identities are mimetic performances, yet not all are experienced as such. Some identity performances are naturalized so much that their performativity is hidden from the performers and their audiences alike (e.g. heteronormative identities in Butler's account; 'unmarked' ethnicities); others are experienced as authentic by their audience, as a result of which they are restrained from investing in legitimate culture and capitalizing on their privileged capacity to frame their performances of femininity in select occasions, or draw upon selectively chosen components of ethnic stereotypes while crafting their personalized, merely expressive ethnic identities. In some cases Whites can even borrow features of Black identity, the same representations that entrap Blacks and restrict their movement in social space, and use them at will (Skeggs 2004, 1-2).

If some performances and life paths accessible to individuals are less likely to be recognized as realizations of their authentic selves, the authenticity ethic may bind actors, restraining action by narrowing repertoires. If some people must align themselves with group norms—or worse, group stereotypes—to be recognized as authentic, then the authenticity ethic re-enforces conformity to stereotypes and group norms rather than disembedding people from restraining social categories, constraining individuals while celebrating their uniqueness and freedom.

Symbolic ethnicities: the privileged of the authenticity regime

Inequality in access to naturalization means that ethnicity works differently for hegemonic groups and minorities. Richard Alba (1990) claimed that contemporary White ethnicities in the USA are significantly different from Black and Latino ones. White ethnicities are voluntary 'symbolic ethnicities' that are not 'reflected in action and experience' and have 'no commitments in terms of action' (Alba 1990, 75). These ethnicities hardly restrict the performative repertoires available to their carriers or their life-chances. Carriers may stress these identities and act upon them at will, adding ethnic spices in selected occasions, or draw on selectively chosen components of ethnic stereotypes while crafting their personalized, merely expressive ethnic identities. In some cases Whites can even borrow features of Black identity, the same representations that entrap Blacks and restrict their movement in social space, and use them at will (Skeggs 2004, 1-2).

Similarly, Sasson-Levy (2013) demonstrates that the ethnicity of Israel’s hegemonic group (Ashkenazim) has transformed: for the younger generation, Ashkenaziness has become a 'thin ethnicity', a mere position of power, without significantly restraining the cultural repertoire available to Ashkenazim or committing them to any particular lifestyle.

I suggest that this differential thickness of ethnic identities is shaped considerably by the authenticity discourse and its unequal application: non-hegemonic ethnic groups have less leeway to experiment with cultural styles without risking accusations of inauthenticity. They are less free to decide when to conform to ethnic stereotypes and when to have them forgotten. The literature on symbolic ethnicities thus demonstrates the impacts of structural inequality in access to recognized authenticity and the symbolic violence it exercises. The common belief that 'there are certain things [e.g. visiting art galleries] that you shouldn't do as a Black person but if you were to do these certain things it makes you very “unblack”' (Rollock et al. 2013, 267) relies on this inequality in access to naturalization: these practices are considered inauthentic for non-hegemonic ethnicities regardless of class background. Non-hegemonic groups have lesser capacity to frame becoming as being, self-transformation as authentic self-realization. This applies most to groups defined by their imagined fixity: some Aboriginal Australians were led to doubt their own authenticity for failing to embody pure Aboriginality, a White discursive construction representing complete fixity (Povinelli 1999). Since hegemonic groups are often defined by their imagined dynamism, their self-transformations are likelier to be considered authentic.

Thick' ethnicities constrain their carriers to repertoires of conduct which are not only narrower but heavily classed. When middle-classness is racialized and considered authentic only for hegemonic groups, middle-class ethnic minorities find it hard to capitalize on their cultural capital: owning and embodying 'legitimate culture' renders them valuable in the symbolic economy of distinction, but exposes them to inauthenticity accusations. Recognized authenticity may have stratification consequences, beyond its phenomenological threat to well-being: some members of middle-class ethnic minorities are eventually deterred from investing in legitimate culture and capitalizing on their privileged class position; instead, they
invest in late acquisition of tastes and styles that may be recognized as authentic but cannot be as easily translated into status and material advantage (e.g. in the job market: Hartmann 2000, Rivera 2012).

Case study: Ashkenazification as symbolic violence

The Israeli common notion of 'Ashkenazification' demonstrates well the misrecognized sources of ascribed inauthenticity. Sasson-Levy and Shoshana (2013) carefully documented lay understandings of Ashkenazification. They found that this emic notion refers to Mizrahim allegedly 'engaging in deception': 'estranged from their “authentic selves”', they adopt instead an 'inauthentic' identity (p.465). But what exactly renders them inauthentic? Looking at Ashkenazification through Bhabha's theorization of postcolonial mimicry, Sasson-Levy and Shoshana take the dispositional path: Ashkenazification, they claim, is a mimetic performance. Ashkenazified individuals (Mishtaknezim) are 'Mizrahim who behave like Ashkenazim', yet they are 'subjects whose inability to perfectly mimic the white or Ashkenazi identity is readily apparent' (p.468). Ashkenazification reflects a desire to become white (p.469) through 'mimicking the habits of the dominant (European) ethnic group', a 'performative movement out of the marked group into the hegemonic one'. This 'passing' project, they claim, is doomed to fail, reaffirming the classification it aims to challenge.

However, Sasson-Levy and Shoshana's data offer a detailed inventory of practices and styles Israelis associate with Ashkenazification. Apparently, Mizrahim are most prone to be accused of Ashkenazification while demonstrating middle-class respectability and engaging in 'legitimate' culture. Ashkenazification markers include linguistic style (academic vocabulary, a 'high' register, a 'soft' intonation); 'highbrow' taste and consumption of legitimate culture (season-tickets for repertoire theatres, a subscription to a broadsheet newspaper, listening to classical music); higher education (writing a PhD thesis) and an 'intelligent' appearance (which is strongly classed: Bourdieu 1993, 177-181; Pape et al. 2012); extracurricular activities for children such as English lessons (typical of the middle-class 'concerted cultivation' parenting style: Lareau 2003), and politeness. These are highly classed practices: access to higher education is strongly associated with class-origin; patterns of cultural taste and consumption in Israel also follow class lines even more than ethnic lines.vi More importantly, practices such as writing a PhD thesis, using academic vocabulary, listening to classical music or reading broadsheets are foreign to the lifestyle of most Ashkenazim. This idealized Ashkenaziness is a discursive fiction. Even among Ashkenazim who engage in these practices, many have only acquired them as adults. The practices that qualify Mizrahim as 'Ashkenazified' are not shared East-European ethnic heritage, but components of upper-middle-class lifestyle (Schwarz 2014).

Ashkenazification is a label used mainly against middle-class Mizrahim who demonstrate cultural preferences typical of their class position. It is not unlikely for second-generation middle-class Mizrahim to have acquired some of these practices early in their socialization, just as many Ashkenazim have acquired these classed practices later in life during class mobility, yet the former are at risk of being accused of inauthentic mimicry, while among the latter the same practices are more likely to be interpreted as authentic self-realization. Mizrahim may be labelled 'Ashkenazified' and accused of 'inauthenticity' without necessarily engaging in actual mimicry or passing (action that lacks dispositional depth), due to the racialization of class in prevailing discourse. Their 'inauthenticity' is mainly a discursive effect.vii

The discursive sources of 'Ashkenazification' and its perceived inauthenticity are most evident among second-generation middle-class Mizrahim. Shoshana (2013, 260) interviewed a Mizrahi father who called his own son 'a little Ashkenazi boy' and an 'Ashkenazified'. This child knew no other lifestyle from which to 'pass': he can only be considered inauthentic while judged against stereotypical representations of Mizrahim as working-class. By collapsing class and ethnic categories he challenged his son's authenticity. As I demonstrate elsewhere, Israelis use the word 'Ashkenazi’ not only as a noun (denoting a Jew of European descent) but also metaphorically, as a common adjective meaning 'posh' or 'middle-class' and used to characterize Israelis of all ethnicities (including Arabs) who perform middle-classness (Schwarz 2014). Israelis load ethnic categories with classed meanings for lack of available language to represent class despite the increasing centrality of class to their structure of social boundaries (as both marriage patterns and everyday evaluation schemes in Israel are increasingly structured on class lines). The actual under-representation of Mizrahim among the Israeli middle-classes has moderately decreased since the 1990s (Cohen and Leon 2008; Dagan-Buzaglo and Konor-Attias 2013; Dahan, 2013), yet when the word for posh is 'Ashkenazi', class categories collapse into ethnic ones and construct the rising Mizrahi middle-class as
inauthentic by definition. Access to naturalization and recognized authenticity is distributed unequally in Israel.

**Authenticity in the ghetto trance**

While the metaphoric usage of ethnic labels to denote class may be endemic to Israel, racialization of class and the ensuing unequal access of middle-class ethnic minorities to experienced and recognized authenticity recur across national contexts.

Louise Archer (2011, 2012) demonstrated how members of ethnic minorities in the UK may be middle-class in terms of wealth, education, occupational status, tastes and lifestyles, yet they are neither recognized as fully middle-class by Whites, nor consider themselves middle-class, as this category is conflated with Whiteness. They are often accused of pretension and inauthenticity, viewed as ethnically inauthentic by their co-ethnics and as class-inauthentic by their White co-class-members. Minorities may be second-generation middle-class, 'public school' (i.e., private school) graduates, yet the authenticity of the dispositions they have acquired in their primary and secondary socialization is often denied recognition. Similarly, Nicola Rollock and her colleagues found that most Britons of Black-Caribbean heritage in middle-class occupations do not identify unambiguously as middle-class, and that some are accused of 'unblack' behaviours (Rollock et al. 2013).

In the USA, Middle-class Afro-American children are often accused of being ‘wannabes’ or ‘acting white’, either because of their bare class (parents’ occupation and family possession) or because of their classed culture and habitus, which are interpreted as indications they were ‘rejecting their true nature’, Black ghetto culture, of which they had no knowledge (Harris 2013, 105-117). Some Afro-American middle-class adolescents endeavour to become more ‘ghetto’ and acquire styles associated with low-income Blacks as a second language. These (often denigrated) styles are acquired since they represent the only way open to Afro-American youths to achieve recognized authenticity (Paillo-McCoy 1999 calls it the 'ghetto trance'. cf. Lacy 2007). As Americans often discursively conflate race with class (Harris 2013; Jhally & Lewis 1992), middle-class Blacks have difficulties defining authentic Blackness in the absence of privation (Jackson 2001, 190, quoted in Austin 2004; Harris 2013; Lacy 2007, 156). The fact that 'Black people with money act like white people' (from their social class) is interpreted as indicating that participation in middle-class culture is inherently inauthentic for Blacks. Gay or feminist masculinities may also threaten the authenticity of Afro-Americans, as they deviate from the cultural repertoire of lower-class Afro-Americans (Favor 1999). Beyond the obvious inequalities in the distribution of authenticity as a desired social good, the classed repertoire of authentic blackness may help reproduce ethnic domination, encouraging minorities to choose 'less rewarding paths' (Harris 2013, 67).

The ghetto trance strategy—investing in substituting illegitimate tastes and practices for legitimate ones—may seem an unthinkable absurdity in terms of the Bourdieusian symbolic economy of distinction. However, for some actors the ‘investment formula’ (Boltanski & Thevenot 2006) of authenticity-worth demands sacrificing other forms of value.

The common accusations of inauthentic mimicry directed at middle-class ethnic minorities in different countries are justified by dispositional and moral notions of authenticity, while misrecognizing the discursive sources of inequality in access to authenticity. Those judged to be inauthentic by these arbitrary discursive schemes often use them themselves against their interests. Shall we then label the effect of these discursive structures 'symbolic violence'?

**Beyond closure**

What can we gain from classifying discursive structures that organize the distribution of recognized and experienced authenticity as 'symbolic violence'? In everyday use 'violence' implies intentionality and voluntariness, yet Bourdieu's use diverts from this _preention_. While highly political, Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence avoids moralism by jettisoning intentionality, defining it by its _actual effect_ (contribution to domination), regardless of _subjective intentions_ and motivations. Symbolic violence must be misrecognized by the dominated to remain efficacious: concealing the power and interests behind it grants it legitimation and elicits complicity from its subjects. The dominant too often misrecognize the symbolic
violence they exercise, which only increases its efficacy.

Bourdieu still often attributed symbolic violence to groups who benefit from it and their unconscious strategies—a problematic theoretical instrument that aroused sharp criticism (eg Alexander 1995). However, little is lost if we subsume under this notion all cultural structures that reinforce domination by securing the embodied complicity of the dominated, without necessarily attributing their emergence and operation to their beneficiaries. These cultural structures exercise power, which may or may not be traced back to strategies of social groups: their classification as symbolic violence may rely merely on their effects. We may then point at the contribution of cultural structures to the creation, preservation and reproduction of inequalities without concluding that they exist in order to produce these effects. By analytically distinguishing structural-relational and cultural-discursive power (Reed 2013), cultural from social structures, we can explore their interrelations (be they mutual constitution or tension) in context.

The notion of symbolic violence remains important for widening our sociological imagination: for pointing at the symbolic underpinning of inequality and power asymmetries in Bourdieu's spirit; explaining the persistence of inequalities; comparing different forms of symbolic domination, and mapping out their evolution. Framing these contributions of the dominated to their own domination as 'violence' helps avoid over-voluntaristic accounts that would blame them for contributing to their domination or voluntarily granting it legitimation.

My account of Ashkenazification pointed at the contribution of cultural-discursive structures (the authenticity ethic, and the ethnicization of class evident in metaphorical language) to the reproduction of ethnic hierarchies. I demonstrated that inequalities in recognition of authenticity follow a logic different from that of inequalities in material distribution or cultural recognition; and that even when social structures lose rigidity (the rise of middle-class Mizrahim), obdurate cultural structures may restrict the capacity of middle-class ethnic minorities to capitalize on their class position and mastery of legitimate culture to acquire recognized social value. Yet, I resisted the temptation to read this process as a neo-Weberian monopolization strategy of Ashkenazim to block entry of Mizrahim into their status group. There are simply no indications that middle-class Ashkenazim are responsible for the genesis and dissemination of these discursive structures more than others; furthermore, marriage patterns indicate that ethnic closure has grown rare in Israel (Okun 2001). The fact that hegemonic groups benefit from cultural structures does not necessarily imply their interest in closure was the motivation behind their formation.

More generally, contemporary notions of authenticity might be traced back to different dynamics, including internal dynamics of the history of ideas (as philosophers usually suggest), Simmelian transformations in sociation structures (Simmel 1955[1922]), Bourdieusian dynamics of class distinction (as authenticity has been associated with unique individuality, a key marker of middle-classness: Bourdieu 1984, Skeggs 2004), or all of the above. The emergence of cultural structures, including those that inflict symbolic violence, is surely not independent from social structure and power relations, but it cannot be reduced a priori to group interests. As Kane (1991) suggested, culture has 'analytical autonomy' but not 'concrete autonomy' from the social. Symbolic violence may derive from either strategic action or unintended consequence of various social and cultural dynamics. By attributing symbolic violence to cultural structures rather than to dominant groups, we may tell stories in which culture is more than a transparent medium of instrumental strategies. Even if unintended, the influences of the authenticity ethic on ethnic- and class-relations are real and oppressive nevertheless.

**Conclusion**

By historicizing symbolic violence we could differentiate between three of its forms, each representing a different cultural ideal of a different era—natural hierarchy, universalist meritocracy, and authentic self-realization—incarnated in the everyday ethic and subjectivities of the dominated to reinforce domination; each associated with a different symbolic economy, each calling forth different coping strategies.

Authenticity is a central cultural ideal and axiological principle in late modernity. While the desire to feel authentic and be recognized as such is nearly ubiquitous, members of hegemonic ethnic groups are more likely to achieve experienced and recognized authenticity. Moving freely between lifestyles, they are likely to have their cultural experimentations recognized as authentic projects of self-realization, with little pressure to conform to ethnic stereotypes. This is not the case with ethnic minorities, who are at risk of being considered (and feeling) inauthentic while deviating from stereotypes. It should be stressed that judgments of authenticity are contextualized in interaction and shaped by concrete interactional performances and
institutional contexts; but while some individuals who belong to middle-class minorities might have never had their authenticity challenged, they are at higher risk of facing such challenges.

While laypersons and sociologists often understand authenticity as the dispositional depth of action, actual distributions of authenticity mainly depend on faithfulness to discursive categories. Where class is strongly racialized and central to ethnic stereotypes, middle-class ethnic minorities may easily be considered inauthentic (even by themselves) for their middle-class dispositions. The faithfulness of middle-class ethnic minorities to their embodied dispositions is often misinterpreted as inauthentic, deceptive and mimetic ‘passing’. This happens simply because the mainly class-based distribution of tastes and dispositions is incompatible with the ethnicized classification of subjects into discursive categories, thus rendering different forms of worth (authenticity and cultural legitimacy) potentially incompatible for middle-class ethnic minorities. The arbitrary principles organizing the social distribution of recognized and experienced authenticity, the differential legitimacy given to engagement in cultural experimentation, the privileges given to carriers of ‘thin’, ‘symbolic’ ethnicities—are all misrecognized and justified as a matter of embodiment and faithfulness to one’s true self.

Heinz-Dieter Meyer (2000) suggested that ever since Rousseau the democratic rhetoric of authenticity has rivaled the aristocratic rhetoric of refinement, offering alternative evaluation criteria and thus allowing the lower classes to resist hierarchies of refinement and symbolic violence (SV2). In his optimistic account this mitigation of symbolic violence is a natural effect of the plurality of logics of evaluation that characterizes ‘pluralistic societies’. However, seemingly contradictory evaluation criteria may be employed in tandem. As the case of middle-class ethnic minorities demonstrates, in such cases plurality can enhance symbolic violence rather than mitigate it, since in order to become a subject of value one has to be simultaneously authentic and refined, and discursive structures render this double demand more contradictory for some actors than for others. This is an important theoretical lesson, since plurality and complexity are often too easily equated with freedom and equality, both within the Weberian tradition and beyond it.

The authenticity ethic has promised to disembell individuals from structural constraints and social scripts associated with ascribed identities—but ended up reinforcing the very same constraints. While giving more leeway to the privileged it further constrains non-hegemonic groups: what it gives with the one hand (while urging actors to engage in introspection for moral direction) it takes with the other (while telling subjects what they should find inside based on their nominal ascribed identities). Constraining actors precisely while celebrating their freedom, from the very heart of liberalism, it is a form of symbolic violence typical of our late-modern times.

References


Dahan, M. 2013. Did the melting pot succeed in the economic field? Economic Quarterly 60:107-152 [Hebrew].

13 Schwarz / The Symbolic Economy of Authenticity


Endnotes

i While the taste for legitimate culture itself is increasingly accused of inauthenticity (Schwarz 2016), legitimate culture still grants its carriers social status, once its appropriation is recognized as authentic.

ii This ideal is ubiquitous in cultural representations, e.g. Billy Elliot, where a working-class boy becomes a ballet dancer, true to his dead mother's words 'always be yourself'.

iii Honneth (2004), more sceptically, diagnosed a neutralization of authenticity’s emancipatory potential once co-opted by capitalism.

iv For reasons of space I cannot discuss the differences, e.g. the unique role class plays in the UK in constructing subject positions, and consequently the sense of class authenticity (eg Lawler 1999) which is unparalleled in the USA or Israel.

v 'Going to university is like soaking in bleach (...) every Mizrahi PhD is Ashkenazified' (a mixed-heritage interviewee in Sagiv 2012, 123).

vi Highbrow cultural taste is more strongly correlated with professional occupation than with ethnicity (Katz-Gerro 2002); taste for classical music is more significantly correlated with class-origin than with ethnicity (Katz-Gerro et al. 2007); college-educated have been more over-represented than Ashkenazim among theatre and classical concert audiences (Katz et al. 2000).

vii While middle-class Mizrahim are at risk for such labeling, some might have never been accused of Ashkenazification: labeling is a contextualized act, relying on discursive structures yet irreducible to them.