
“Those who are held to be distinguished have the privilege of not worrying about their distinction … bourgeois discretion signals its presence by a sort of ostentatious discretion, sobriety and understatement” (Bourdieu 1984 [1979]). Bourdieu’s observation of *l’ostentation de la discretion* of French elites translates without much difficulty into the sociology of some modern British elites, or, for example, to the contemporary cultures of British diplomacy. But Bourdieu’s ostentatious discretion is a theoretical observation of specific empirical cases that give us no *a priori* assurance of universal application. In *The Sociology of Elite Distinction* (2010), Jean-Pascal Daloz provides a word of caution to those of us with an interest in elite groups; that some social distinctions are rendered meaningless when removed from their immediate context—that it is problematic to attempt to fit empirical realities into preconceived theoretical moulds—and that the best studies of elite distinction and symbolic superiority are grounded in empirical realities and not universalistic theories. In sum, the principal argument that runs throughout *The Sociology of Elite Distinction* is that all the existing theories of elite distinction are useful, but only “if we do not see them as reading grids that could systematically be applied across cases and contexts, but rather as tools useful for interrogating particularities” (Daloz 2010, 119). Daloz is far from being an advocate of hyper-empiricism. His skepticism of reductionist generalization will generate criticism from scholars who cling to a homogenous conceptual framework—whether faithful to Veblen, Weber, Sombart, Bourdieu, functionalist or post-modern.

Daloz has earned such criticism, because what he presents in *The Sociology of Elite Distinction* is a superb, balanced and critical synthesis of the major theoretical and comparative works that deal with elite distinction that does not unduly favour one school over another: he provides us with a comprehensive “reading grid” through which we can construct theoretical insights drawn from our empirical observations. Daloz’s book fills a gap in the literature on elites; it offers modestly to the reader an assessment of the key works on elite distinction and a checklist of the “key manifestations” typically found in existing studies of symbolic superiority. It is a daunting task, when confronted with hundreds of pages of field notes on an elite group, to begin to draw generalizations and make theoretical connections, but Daloz has rendered this task less gargantuan by illuminating a path to, and through, the existing literature.

*The Sociology of Elite Distinction* is divided into three parts: social theory and elite distinction, key manifestations, and variability. The first part introduces classical and contemporary contributions to the field, with short discussions of Spencer, Tarde, Veblen, Simmel, Weber, Sombart, (neo-)Marxists, functionalists, Elias, Goffman, Bourdieu, Baudrillard, post-modernists, psychologists and socio-economists. The second part provides a checklist of common manifestations of elite distinction: external signs of superiority, embodied signs of superiority and vicarious display. The final section examines the historicity of elite distinction, attitudes towards tradition and novelty, and style and dominant codes. Throughout the book,