CHAPTER 14

Producing a Global Elite? The Endurance of the National in Elite American and British Universities

Jonathan Z. Friedman

To some, ours is an age marked by the emergence of a global elite: a small sliver of the world's population that has come to control vast amounts of political and economic power, without much regard for national borders (Freeland 2012; Rothkopf 2008; Sklair 2001).[1] Associated with cosmopolitan attitudes, jet-setting travel, and philanthropic benevolence, individuals in this global class have been described as "a nation unto themselves" (Freeland, p. 58), sharing more in common with each other transnationally than they do with fellow citizens from less affluent social strata. The emergence of this class and its ability to concentrate great wealth and power has been frequently tied to the proliferation of international business; but it has also been interlinked with key changes in the realm of education, such as the worldwide growth of international schools, as well as the dominance of elite Western universities as pathways into prestigious careers.

Elite educational institutions have long been seen as a form of breeding ground, where the children of advantage congregate to gain first-rate

J.Z. Friedman (✉)
New York University, New York, NY, USA
e-mail: j.friedman@nyu.edu

R. Bloch et al. (eds.), *Universities and the Production of Elites*,
Palgrave Studies in Global Higher Education,
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-53970-6_14

instruction, receive informal lessons in high-culture tastes and behaviors, join key elite social networks, and above all, acquire high-status credentials. In America and Britain, this view has been generally applied to the study of both private boarding schools (Cookson and Persell 1985; Khan 2011), as well as top national universities (Binder et al. 2016; Brown et al. 2016). With globalization however, such processes which were once viewed as taking place nationally have come to be seen as having global elements and repercussions. Particularly at the tertiary level, scholars have highlighted the "supreme value" of educational credentials from elite universities in these two Anglophone countries on the global stage (Marginson 2006, p. 21). Some stress how these institutions now admit high-achieving students from high socio-economic backgrounds, many of which have grown up across multiple countries, known as 'third culture kids' (Vandrick 2011).[2] Others suggest that, in a related fashion, cosmopolitanism has been institutionalized as an unequal form of cultural capital which these institutions bequeath to their graduates, who are able to signal their worldliness for labor market advantages (Igarashi and Saito 2014). In these ways, elite universities in the US and UK have been cast as part of a global system of elite production: incubators where the world's future political and business leaders forge ties, develop shared sensibilities, and gain the necessary opportunities to ascend into this transnational class.

Compelling as these accounts may be, there is reason to consider their limitations. For, somewhat implicit in discussions of the 'global' elite has been an expectation that the 'national' has lost its historic significance to elite formation. To be sure, a range of scholars have discussed the idea of convergence as a central aspect of globalization, where national societies that were once thought to be structurally and culturally distinct have over time come to resemble one another quite strikingly (Bennett 1991; Meyer et al. 1997). In higher education in particular, scholars have highlighted cross-national similarities in the organization of mass tertiary systems (Shavit et al. 2007), the model of the university as a social institution (Meyer et al. 2007), the structuring of academic disciplines (Frank and Gabler 2006), and the rise of neoliberalism in approaches to management (Slaughter and Rhoades 2000). This is especially so between the US and UK with scholars suggesting that the two countries have undergone strong convergence in higher education (Pickard 2014), and that universities worldwide have tended to emulate their models and traditions.

Scholarship on convergence in higher education, however, has tended to focus more on the production of research and the organization of mass systems than on the everyday practices that go on inside universities related to education. Yet much prior work has suggested that cultural differences between the US and UK in this realm are significant. Turner (1960), for example, argued that norms for gaining admission to selective institutions differed between them, as he characterized the United States as a 'contest' system – in which pathways into the elite school were won through a publicly legitimated competition – and the UK as a 'sponsorship' system – in which applicants were selected by those already in power, and promoted through social networks. Cookson and Persell (1985) also described cultural differences in the way students were socialized to behave in elite boarding schools, with British students expected to "parade their eliteness publicly" (p. 29), while American students were taught to disguise their high-culture tastes and downplay their social advantage – an observation about American elites which has been reaffirmed more recently by Khan (2011).

Despite this history of Anglo-American comparison, recent discussions of the global elite class and the global elite university have delved into the cultural dimensions of schooling only minimally. Freeland (2012), for example, suggests that entrance to elite universities in the two countries is now a hallmark for the children of the global 1 percent, who she says are accustomed to operating fluidly across national borders, and have a shared identity as "citizens of the world." Yet she does not examine how such students actually choose to pursue these credentials, or how they make sense of their own identity, treating the global elite, and elite American and British universities, as largely undifferentiated groups. Similarly, Baker (2014) posits that global elite universities no longer produce national elites, so committed have they become to a mission to be global and serve the world as a whole. However, he too offers little empirical evidence concerning what messages students are receiving, internalizing or reproducing as they move through these institutions, eliding the possibility that any patriotic or geopolitical sentiments endure inside them. Given that elite universities' historic ties were to national cultures and national spheres of political and economic power however, there is reason to suspect that cultural differences between them have lingered, and that their political ties to the nation-state have not unraveled completely.

This chapter offers a preliminary consideration of this topic, by comparing data from interviews with university personnel at two case universities

from the US and UK.: *American Elite* (AE) and *British Elite* (BE). In the sections below, I first detail the research study on which this chapter is based and then analyze three cultural dimensions of the production of elites across these two institutions, including (1) how students are evaluated for admission, (2) how university personnel perceive the aims of the education they offer, and (3) the linkages which university personnel perceive between these universities and their national societies. I end by discussing the endurance of the national in the educational dimensions of these two global elite universities – even while other aspects of their operation are convergent – and call for more nuanced research and analysis in thinking about the place of the national in the formation of the global elite class.

The Study

The two universities at the center of this analysis were each visited as part of a larger comparative study of internationalization and globalization in American and British universities conducted in 2013–2014. Each is an elite university in its own national context, with a long history of being seen as a stepping stone to high-paying jobs and the upper echelons of society. Each has also long been a target for public criticism of how elite families reproduce their social advantage. Today, these two institutions are among those which share top billing in various global university rankings, commanding immeasurable prestige worldwide. If elite Western universities have indeed transformed into breeding a global elite – disconnected from national borders and identity politics – then these cases form appropriate empiric referents for capturing such a trend.

At each site, semi-structured interviews were conducted with university administrators working in a range of offices, to examine similarities and differences in the motives, rationales and conceptions of international dimensions of higher education. Participants ranged in age, time working at the institution, level of seniority, and core responsibilities; but all were collectively involved in the administration and operation of their particular universities, based in different offices. Some had academic backgrounds, while others had significant employment experience outside of academia. To offer confidentiality to the study's participants, institutional pseudonyms are employed herein (*American Elite* and *British Elite*), and in some cases, other personal details have been altered.

One-on-one interviews with participants were driven by open-ended questions, and discussions covered a range of topics, as university personnel commented on issues like institutional status and research priorities, views of incoming students and expectations of outgoing graduates, and their sense of their nation's place in the world. Findings presented in this chapter are based on an analysis of 20 such interviews, 12 of which were conducted at AE, and eight of which were conducted at BE.[3] Although a small sample, and only one lens on these institutions, these qualitative data provide rich insight into the way some of the individuals who work inside them think about issues like student admissions, education and training, and the production of world leaders. Together, they provide a window on both cross-national similarities and differences in the production of elites, and an empirical source for approaching this as a global phenomenon. Throughout, the focus will be on undergraduate education, because this was a common topic across the interviews, and because this level of schooling marks students' transition into adulthood and a key phase in their preparation for future careers.

Getting in

For the legions of students who dream of attending AE or BE, gaining admission is no easy feat. The process is arduous and involves scoring well on standardized tests (such as scholastic aptitude tests (SATs) in the United States, and A-levels in the UK), procuring positive recommendation letters from secondary-level teachers, producing finely tailored personal statements, and appearing favorably in individual interviews. Applicants who are national citizens of any country in the world are allowed to apply to both AE and BE, and the number of students who decide to do so annually has grown in the past two decades. Despite the rising applicant pool however, admission slots have not expanded in tandem, and today these universities are among the most selective in each of their countries, if not the world. Owing to their high status, these institutions face unique popular and academic scrutiny of their admissions criteria, and there is no shortage of advice circulating through social networks and on the Internet for how students should craft personal statements or behave in interviews in order to sway admissions gatekeepers.

Beyond these general similarities, some differences remain salient between these two global higher education leaders. In conversations at

BE, personnel stressed that admissions was based on "academic potential alone," and that other factors of individual biography such as extracurricular interests or socio-economic status were considered only secondarily, if they were considered at all. Interviewees pointed out how this was significantly different from the United States. As an officer in the university's international strategy office explained:

> A lot of US universities, when they're recruiting at undergraduate level, they're very interested in what sports people play or whether they're on the debate team or whatever . . . and we always make a big point about saying that it really doesn't matter to us. . . . We're looking to recruit the people who have the most excellence within their subjects, and we're totally unconcerned about their all-round ability.[4]

In this way, admissions decisions at BE were rationalized as involving a technical process, in which the best students are identified based on rational evaluations of intellect, and without regard for extracurricular talents or "all-round ability." Mountford-Zimdars (2014) has referred to this as a focus in the UK on "individual merit," and others have suggested this attitude tends to be shared not just by those who work in elite British universities like BE, but also by students who gain admission (Warikoo and Fuhr 2014). This academic focus is also reflected in the actual admissions process, as it is professors who are appointed in a particular academic program who are recruited to serve as admissions tutors for each application cycle, charged with conducting the interviews and making decisions about who to admit. The gatekeepers at BE are thus predominantly subject-specific: individuals who have expertise in an academic field and are evaluating potential candidates for that field. Further, although students are required to compose personal statements as part of their application packages, these are not specific to BE, but part of a general application which goes to multiple universities. BE, along with other leading British universities, encourages applicants to focus these statements on their rationales for pursuing academic study, insisting that other extra-curricular interests may be included, but are neither necessary, nor considered significant.

Admissions in the US indeed work differently. AE is avowedly committed to a broad consideration of individuals' talents, interests and accomplishments, looking beyond the academic evaluations of teachers and tests when evaluating applicants. Karabel (2005) explains that this

distinctly American practice evolved so that elite universities could control admissions in an opaque fashion, as their Anglo-Saxon leaders sought, in the early twentieth century, to limit admission of "socially undesirable" groups like Jews of East European descent, who had begun to excel in conventional measures of academic merit. University leaders turned to admitting students based on what they called "character," a vague and largely intangible personal trait which gave them "the latitude to admit the dull sons of major donors and to exclude the brilliant but unpolished children of immigrants" (Karabel, p. 2). The practice became institutionalized in elite US higher education, and Stevens (2007) has chronicled how prestigious liberal arts colleges there continue to make complex calculations concerning applicants, involving judgments about their past accomplishments and future potential. Elsewhere, he describes how having a diverse group of students from across the continental US as well as from a range of ethnic and racial backgrounds has also come to be a mark of prestige among elite US universities, as well as an important symbolic reinforcement of the national narrative of equal opportunity (Stevens and Roksa 2011). Applicants to AE and its peer institutions are thus encouraged to give substantial weight to biographical considerations and unique interests and talents in their personal essays and interviews – to articulate their unique 'character' – which they can also tailor to universities differently. It remains possible to gain admission and even scholarships to elite US institutions based on a proclivity in sports or the performing arts, rather than on scholastic performance alone.

As part of this history, undergraduate admissions processes were thus institutionalized differently in the US than in the UK, and they came to be managed by a professional cadre of officers who often do not have expertise in the academic fields students apply to study. Unlike at BE, where admissions interviews are mandatory and conducted by academic tutors, at AE such interviews are only encouraged, and are usually conducted by alumni, who then report their impressions to the university's admissions office. Reflecting an American national ethos that has long prized 'rags to riches' narratives of individuals who are able to 'pick themselves up by the bootstraps,' admissions officers at AE have become particularly fond of finding students from modest beginnings who exhibit this unique kind of 'character,' to be admitted alongside their more affluent applicants. For example, AE's director of international admissions explained that his job involved trying to find ambitious students who have "not let their

circumstances deter them." He explained how he tried to judge applicants from around the world "in their context" as a form of "free and fair" competition:

> We can't reward a student for what opportunities he or she has had available, only look to see to what extent they've made the most of those opportunities. So in that sense I think it is free and fair. We don't expect everybody to hit a certain mark, belong to x number of clubs. . . . so it is very much looking at a student in his or her context. And I feel pretty strongly that it is a free and fair comparison, because we really do compare the kid from Singapore to the kid in Syracuse, to the kid in Sierra Leone, but in their context, their representative context.

Rather than seeing his work as involving strictly rational calibrations of academic intellect, this administrator repeatedly spoke of his office's need to evaluate students holistically, in terms of how they had taken advantage of the "opportunities" with which they were presented in life. Along with other interviewees at AE, he also spoke about the importance of selecting not just students who would thrive at the institution, but who would "contribute" to it – a notion that was virtually absent in conversations at BE.

Offers of admission, and who is able to take advantage of them, are also tied up with financial considerations in different ways between these two institutions. AE offers need-blind admission to all of its applicants: selecting students without regard for their ability to pay its high tuition, and then using their generous endowment to subsidize students from families at different income thresholds. For those who can afford it, tuition in recent years has surpassed $40,000, but many admitted students do not pay it in full. There is also no substantial difference in tuition charged to domestic and foreign students. At BE though, domestic students as well as those from the European Union (EU) are charged less tuition than their international peers. Apart from some institutional scholarships and subsidy programs, most students must pay full tuition, which for universities in England increased in 2012 to £9,000 for UK and EU students. Tuition and fees for international students meanwhile can total as much as £20,000 or £30,000, depending on the course of study. While students from the UK and EU are able to access loans from the UK to cover these costs, their peers from other international origins cannot.

This means that in addition to differing evaluations of merit and admissions processes, the incoming students at AE and BE face different

financial obligations. This impacts how they are recruited as well as how they get in. At AE the director of international admissions stressed that one of his chief challenges was simply "getting the word out": communicating the university's advantageous offer around the world, especially to students from lower-class backgrounds in foreign countries who often believe that attending it is out of their reach. At BE, by contrast, one interviewee explained that the university had "little appetite" for focusing on recruitment in countries in Africa, as she emphasized that their main priority was "to recruit excellence" and they did not view secondary education in most African countries as very strong. Another administrator at BE felt that the university's international student population was restricted to "those who could pay," and seldom included foreign students from lower social strata.

In this way, there is reason to suggest that AE and BE do not form a singular pathway into the global elite, but rather somewhat differentiated avenues. Indeed, Mountford-Zimdars (2014), in an analysis of similar interviews with admissions personnel in the two countries, also found such variation, theorizing that while a focus on "individual merit" was the hallmark of elite admissions in the UK, there was a greater focus on "social utility" in the United States, meaning a concern for future benefits to society that extend beyond academic considerations. This is evident here in the focus in the United States on students who "make the most of their opportunities" rather than on the most academically able. As Mountford-Zimdars explains, even though these two systems do bear a new semblance as two 'contest' systems in which individuals must compete for slots, they retain a cultural difference, with a new axis of variation formed around the way they asses admissions merit.

This does not mean that the same student could not gain admission to both, or that many children of the new global elite class do not try. However, there are significant differences in the means by which offers of admission can be legitimated, giving gatekeepers at the two institutions different kinds of latitude to justify their choices. Depending on their background, an applicant may also face very different financial obligations upon admission, with AE being more advantageous to those from lower socio-economic strata (who can gain full scholarships), and BE likely being more advantageous to those from higher socio-economic strata (who will pay less tuition overall). As their admissions processes are not regulated by the same cultures of

valuation or financial dispensation, there is cause to suggest that the ways these two institutions structure pathways into the global elite have not completely converged to a uniform model.

The Aims of Elite Education

Not all of those interviewed agreed with their universities' admissions policies, nor were they necessarily familiar with these cross-national differences. But there was collective sentiment at both AE and BE that their institutions' reputations helped them recruit the "best and brightest" students from around the world, and that they offered these students the best possible undergraduate education. Nonetheless, they had differing visions of what this entails.

Mirroring their focus on students' academic abilities, individuals at BE tended to describe their aim of educating students who would be the best in their academic fields. The international strategy officer related this to what she understood as a British tradition of "specialism and excellence" in education. Others stressed how the university's education was "first-rate" and had a history of educating people "to a particularly high level." One administrator who worked on curriculum policy explained that the university brought in "talented people" and was engaged in "curating" them "in a selective way." Another interviewee reflected similarly that BE students are "thrown into a very high pressured, high quality, highly competitive course from day one." She contrasted this intensity and depth with American elite universities, which she viewed as offering an education that was "broader" and "shallower."

Interviewees at AE may have seen their educational offering as similarly excellent; but in conversation they tended not to emphasize competition, selectivity, or specialism as its particular virtues. Instead, they focused on how the university's liberal arts curriculum produced "well-rounded" students who would be able to solve "complex global problems" such as international debt, population growth, and climate change. One dean who oversaw the university's general education curricular requirements referred to their students as "go-getters" and explained the rationale for the university's core liberal arts courses thus: "Our students are going to go out in the world and be leaders and citizens and we want them to be informed, educated, and thoughtful leaders and citizens. And that's what we want them to be getting out of this." As part of this aim, she wanted to ensure students understood "something about global forces" and that they had "deep knowledge about

cultural differences," especially, as she noted, before trying to effect change in foreign countries. The director of international admissions echoed this view, explaining that he believed they were "investing in students as individuals" and giving them "the skills and abilities to do good things with their lives." He was adamant that graduates would go on to use their education from AE "for the benefit of a bigger ripple" in the world – reflecting the focus on "social utility" in their admissions decisions described above.

Personnel at AE also tended to view undergraduate education, or the experience of "college," as a fundamentally transformational time in their students' lives. A dean of students referred to their need to recognize that students are "still developing people," and that as they begin to make choices concerning their adult lives, they need "nurturance and oversight and guidance." Corresponding with the view that incoming students would contribute to the community at AE, these personnel also imagined that they were contributing to students' growth. One dean related her vision that they were working to produce "global citizens," who would recognize that many of the world's problems must be solved globally, and would appreciate the challenges of seeing things from other cultures' perspectives. By admitting both domestic and international students and giving them four years to be educated together, another administrator explained that AE was "making the world a better place."

Individuals at BE shared similarly altruistic visions of their institution's role in the world, but they linked this much more to the university's research outputs, like producing cures for global diseases, than to any effort to transform their students as emerging adults. In fact, some were expressly opposed to the idea that the university should be doing anything like this. One administrator related that she and her colleagues viewed the idea of global citizenship as "kind of shallow" and "passé." She elaborated:

> I think nothing makes you a better global citizen than being the top global person in your area (laughs).... I think it's important that people have the right support within their area to do the best they can within their studies and to do the best they can internationally within their role.... but I don't – the idea that you somehow train people, you know somehow in globalization, other than that, other than how it pertains to their subject, to me seems like a distraction from developing excellence.

At BE, participants related that the focus of undergraduate education was thus on preparing students to "develop excellence" in particular subjects,

so that they could work on global challenges through research. These individuals spoke about their graduates getting "elite jobs. . . . some of the best jobs in the world," attaining "world leading roles and influence," and going on "to do phenomenal things," espousing in practical terms what they believed their rigorous teaching and high-status credential offered their pupils. But the vision at AE was broader, as personnel there spoke more passionately, elaborately and idealistically about their graduates effecting social change in the world as a result of their unique experiences at the institution.

These data suggest that the undergraduate experience of these two academic institutions is not entirely interchangeable. At AE, just as admissions processes have been regulated by conceptions of "character" and "social utility," so too is the vision of the ideal student that of a generalist with a broad liberal arts education, primed to effect social change. Meanwhile at BE, a focus on "specialism and excellence" is similarly evident in both the admissions process and the approach to "curating" students, with the model student someone who becomes a leading expert in a particular academic field. It is not possible from this study to assess how these institutional conceptions permeate students' views of themselves, but it is possible to surmise that they are exposed to these different expectations about their future social contributions. Rather than together helping to produce a global elite with uniform attitudes and values then, these interviews reveal how these universities continue to reflect national educational traditions. As Cookson and Persell (1985) suggested a generation ago, personnel at elite American and British educational institutions seem to approach education with different goals in mind, even if they simultaneously share some components in common.

Linkages with National Society

So far the emphasis has been on cultural differences between AE and BE; but there is also a key similarity they share, as there are some ways in which both remain strongly tethered to their national societies. For example, both continue to predominantly admit undergraduate students who are national citizens, even though they do not claim, officially, that such national service is part of their mission. Thus at AE, international student enrollment has not surpassed 15 percent of an incoming class, and at BE, it has not surpassed 20 percent. There are admittedly fewer international

applicants than domestic ones to both institutions; but to suggest that national membership has nothing to do with admissions is to overlook the fact that there are annually recurring limitations on how many international students are offered slots, or that their personnel may choose to keep this population in check.

For example, some personnel at these two universities explained that they felt this was important, as they saw these institutions as somewhat obligated to serve their national populations first. One administrator explained:

> You don't want to jettison that valuable resource you have in the UK in this institution... and throw that overboard and say that doesn't matter, we'll just open the gates to all comers. I think there's still a sense... there's an obligation to development talent within the country.

To him, BE was a "valuable resource" to the country that should continue to be protected. Another administrator who worked in BE's office of diversity and equities concurred, explaining that there was massive domestic demand for admission which had to be met. She related: "Most high achieving students in UK schools will see it as the pinnacle of what they want to achieve." Even a relatively younger interviewee, who was a recent graduate elected as a representative for BE's student union, shared this view:

> It's actually a view – and it's something we've talked about here, me and my colleagues, a lot recently. It's something I'm very uncomfortable about and it's something that my British colleagues are very uncomfortable about.... I'm not particularly patriotic and everyone I spoke to about this felt the same, but there is something ingrained deep (laughs) down inside me that makes me feel like [this university] has a responsibility to the UK to train a particular percentage of British students.

Despite his own discomfort with the idea, this interviewee, and others, expressed strong feelings that BE should continue to admit and train British students in high numbers.

At AE, similarly, an administrator working in the office for international students and scholars suggested at first that the university did not have any national obligations to the US. Despite this initial reluctance, over the course of the interview she changed her mind: "I'm going to backtrack

now on half my answers," she said, "but I think the university probably *does* have . . . the university feels an obligation to the American students, to give them the opportunity." Though she was unfamiliar with any discussions about limiting the number of international students admitted, she had the sense that such conversations were probably taking place in other parts of her institution. An administrator working on the business school's international programs who had worked there for 20 years likewise shared that such a national sentiment to admit US students remained in the air, particularly among some of the school's alumni and donors. He related: "I think we still feel as though there's a responsibility to the US, to the US economy, and to the US business world."

As mentioned above, there were some personnel who spoke about producing global citizens or world leaders at both sites. However, these comments were intertwined with others which positioned these universities as still having a responsibility to train leaders for their national societies. At BE, one administrator related that the university was historically seen as an "incubator" for leadership in the UK, and that it remained an important British institution, "like the monarchy and the BBC." As such, she emphasized that it was still important for the university to serve as an "escalator of opportunity" for people going into national leadership roles. Others agreed, with some noting in particular that if more students were admitted from the international realm, it would challenge BE's efforts to admit enough domestic students from lower social class backgrounds, an issue which they stressed as important. One administrator offered that BE was not really 'global' at the undergraduate level, even as much as it was seen as a global leader in terms of its graduate education and cutting-edge research. Similarly, the representative of the student union clarified that the university had a "mixture" of obligations, functioning to help humanity as well as to help British people.

At AE, an administrator in the central international office questioned whether the university was truly 'global' too:

> Are we an American institution with a global reach, or are we a global institution that happens to be situated in the United States? I'm pretty sure the answer today is the former, a US institution with a global reach; and for the foreseeable future I would see it being the same. . . . I think there are certain values [which] probably cannot be decoupled from our location in the United States.

As much as this administrator recognized the institution's "global reach," he also recognized that its values were still strongly tethered to its national context. Another administrator who worked in communications was similarly reluctant to say that they did not have any national obligations, and sought to balance the two: "We care deeply about the American government system and about American citizens, but we also care about the world and about being a citizen of the world, as well as a citizen of this country." Elaborating on this idea, she stressed, "I don't think that one is at the expense of the other."

Thus not only do these institutions each overwhelmingly admit their own national citizens as students, they also continue to be seen by some of their personnel as national institutions, subject to national obligations and reflecting national values. Although not all interviewees espoused these views in concert, their endurance reflects the reality that the national has not necessarily faded with globalization, a view which has been espoused by others (Marginson and Rhoades 2002; Nelson and Wei 2012). Such national linkages remain largely implicit for university personnel when they discuss their work to produce future leaders, even when they also expect students to develop particular mindsets toward cultural differences or global responsibilities. As much as their students are forecasted to become world leaders, students admitted from their domestic pools still attend institutions where one message in circulation is that they continue to serve national interests. Some personnel, especially in the US, were somewhat reluctant to express this, or, in the case of the student representative in the UK, regretted it. But they nonetheless related that the national was important to these institutions' historic legacies and contemporary mandates.

Discussion: The Endurance of the National in Elite Universities

It is evident from these three comparisons that to visit these two universities and speak with their personnel is not to visit two sites that are entirely alike in their priorities and values. Though they do share a great deal in common – for example, in their similar positioning atop their domestic higher education systems, in their dispensation of high-status credentials, and in their ontologies as institutions responsible for research and teaching – it is also apparent that some

aspects of their ongoing operation remain dependent on traditions which are nationally based, and nationally variable.

Thus at BE, personnel emphasized their limited focus on academic ability as the sole determining factor in admissions, which is reflected in the way their admissions process has been organized, with professors central to all stages of decision-making. The university also offers limited financial support to its international applicants, which may play a significant role in who chooses to apply, and who is able to take advantage of admission offers. Further, personnel at BE collectively extolled the virtues of their competitive, selective, and specialized educational offering, stressing how this would produce individuals who were the best in their fields. Thereby, they prized the depth and rigor of their education as its signal value. Although some discussed how their students would move into positions of national and global leadership, they did not really connect such career trajectories to the experience of studying at BE, but rather to the talent that incoming students already possessed, which they simply sought to harness into an acumen for excellence.

By contrast, personnel at AE detailed their holistic evaluation of applicants, their general liberal arts curriculum, and their aim to produce "thoughtful leaders and citizens" who would go on to solve global problems. Admissions processes were not just structured differently at AE; they operated according to a unique logic, the product of a past decision to give their personnel greater discretion in admissions decisions (Karabel 2005). In this system, applicants are evaluated by admissions professionals rather than academic specialists, and are interviewed by alumni who, in theory, exemplify the "character" traits the institution is searching for, and know how to identify them in others. There is also much greater latitude at AE to admit students regardless of their financial background, and an emphasis placed on how incoming students will contribute to the university's community, first as a student, but later, as an alum and potential donor. Education at AE is thus largely viewed as a transformational experience, aiming to catalyze individual growth, civic responsibility, and produce more generalists than specialists. In interviews at AE, there was an explicit and widespread focus on the ideal of preparing students to improve the world and work across cultures – a focus on "social utility." Whereas, to some at BE, such extra-curricular and extra-academic engagement was viewed as peripheral to the institution's core responsibilities, which centered on "individual merit."

The implication of these cultural differences is not that there is no global elite class or that these universities do not play a role in its production. However, this comparison does suggest that the educational pathways through these two universities each remain marked by the national in significant ways. Even as various policies and practices between them are convergent (Pickard 2014), it is the endurance of these national traditions, alongside ostensibly global trends, which deserves greater scholarly consideration. As Laura Adams (2008) has theorized elsewhere, this is perhaps best understood as a convergence in cultural form rather than total convergence in cultural content. By this I mean that though many of the structures and practices of higher education have become undeniably similar between the two contexts, elements of cultural content – such as how university personnel judge merit or articulate their institutions' purpose – have not necessarily become cross-nationally uniform. Just as Adams used the distinction between form and content to explain the worldwide diffusion of forms of cultural production (such as the importance of a 'national' dance), alongside the reproduction of different kinds of cultural content (such as different kinds of dance steps), so too am I suggesting that convergence in these elite educational institutions can be partial, allowing them to appear similar in many ways, yet remain different in others.

In as much as these universities have been conceived as institutions for the cultural production of a global elite then, they are better understood as incubators of high-status dispositions that derived their power historically from their distinctly national fields, and largely, continue to do so. While they may bring together individuals from diverse backgrounds in a spirit of cosmopolitanism, AE and BE are also each tethered to their national contexts, producing somewhat competing – rather than consensual – visions of merit, and of what an elite undergraduate education entails. In essence, the cultural differences highlighted in this chapter seem to have largely impeded the total cross-national convergence in the idea and practice of elite higher education, even when other aspects of the elite research university as an organizational model appear globally homogenous (Baker 2014).

Thus while Freeland (2012) and others have articulated a vision of a global elite operating across national borders and developing a shared identity, these findings suggest that scholars must go farther in exploring cross-national variation among these individuals. In particular, for those who look at AE and BE as institutional breeding grounds for this transnational class, there is a need for more nuanced analysis of the values and

expectations to which their students are being socialized. Some scholars, like Calhoun (2007), have been emphatic that nationalism remains the means of organizing and dividing the world, even in the contemporary globalized era, and this view is largely supported by these findings, as the national has not faded as a form of difference, nor ideological tether, for personnel at these institutions. It is possible, of course, that the visions articulated by participants in this study do not trickle down into actual experiences of their students, and that another sample of interviewees, perhaps drawn exclusively from the ranks of faculty, would illuminate a different picture. However, it is also likely that even members of the global elite continue to experience national borders and cultural differences in significant ways, and that such differences remain present in the educational institutions through which their children are molded for the future. Examining how these populations modulate between the national and the global, and how institutions like elite universities experience both at the same time, may be of more analytic utility than suggesting that all has become 'global' in a homogenous and uniform fashion.

Finally, it is also necessary to consider the distinctly national benefits to the US and UK of having universities that have attained supreme global status. For, as the credentials they offer have come to be seen as essential capital on the trajectory into the global elite, AE, BE, and some of their domestic institutional peers, have been able to attract many of the world's highest-achieving students. By continuing to predominantly admit students from their own national populations however, they privilege the transition of their own citizens into positions of global power (Igarashi and Saito 2014). Research into the global elite, therefore, as much as it has centered on the transcendence of the nation-state system, must do more to recognize that this class has emerged in a world-system where older international inequalities linger, and where the national retains significant power over some of the mechanisms of elite production, such as elite universities. As such, the production of the global elite may be global in its repercussions, but the processes behind it continue to favor middle and upper class children born in Western countries to English-speaking parents. Likewise, while the national may indeed be more muted today in globalizing processes, its historic entanglement with elite universities remains a part of the way they process students for positions of global leadership.

Concerning the claim that institutions like AE and BE have together come to produce a global elite class then, this chapter suggests the

need for a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. Indeed, the production of the global elite may not be as harmonious as has been previously presumed, as elites from different countries may share some forms cosmopolitan capital and fellowship in common, yet fall short of forming a cohesive "nation unto themselves." That elite universities in multiple countries have come to be seen as incubators for this transnational class suggests that the ways in which they converge and diverge in their cultural and organizational practices are important topics for further consideration. As yet, these findings challenge the view that the global elite has come to be constituted as an entirely denationalized social formation.

Notes

1. Special thanks to the volume editors and to Mitchell Stevens for helpful comments on earlier versions of this chapter.
2. For more on the notion of 'third culture kids,' see Fail et al. (2004).
3. Of the 20 interviews analyzed for this chapter, 19 were conducted in face-to-face meetings in participants' offices, and one was conducted via telephone. All of those interviewed gave consent to participate in the study, and interview length varied depending on their availability, with an average interview length of 73 minutes. Interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and then analyzed using the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti.
4. Quotations in this chapter have been reproduced verbatim from the transcripts of the interviews, but false starts were removed. Ellipses with three periods indicate pauses in the comments of the interviewees, and four periods indicate where some text was omitted.

References

Adams, L. (2008). Globalization, Universalism, and Cultural Form. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 50(3), pp. 614–640.

Baker, D. (2014). *The Schooled Society: The Educational Transformation of Global Culture*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Bennett, C. (1991). What is Policy Convergence and What Causes it?. *British Journal of Political Science*, 21(2), pp. 215–233.

Binder, A., Davis, D., and Bloom, N. (2016). Career Funneling: How Elite Students Learn to Define and Desire "Prestigious" Jobs. *Sociology of Education*, 89(1), pp. 20–39.

Brown, P., Power, S., Tholen, G., and Allouch, A. (2016). Credentials, Talent and Cultural Capital: A Comparative Study of Educational Elites in England and France. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 37(2), pp. 191–211.

Calhoun, C. J. (2007). *Nations Matter: Culture, History, and the Cosmopolitan Dream*. New York: Routledge.

Cookson, P., and Persell, C. (1985). *Preparing for Power: America's Elite Boarding Schools*. New York: Basic Books.

Fail, H., Thompson, J., and Walker, G. (2004). Belonging, Identity and Third Culture Kids. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 3(3), pp. 319–338.

Frank, D., and Gabler, J. (2006). *Reconstructing the University: Worldwide shifts in Academia in the 20th Century*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Freeland, C. (2012). *Plutocrats: The Rise of the New Global Super-rich and the Fall of Everyone Else*. New York: Penguin Press.

Igarashi, H., and Saito, H. (2014). Cosmopolitanism as Cultural Capital: Exploring the Intersection of Globalization, Education and Stratification. *Cultural Sociology*, 8(3), pp. 222–239.

Karabel, J. (2005). *The Chosen: The Hidden History of Admission and Exclusion at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Khan, S. (2011). *Privilege: The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St. Paul's School*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Marginson, S. (2006). Dynamics of National and Global Competition in Higher Education. *Higher Education*, 52(1), pp. 1–39.

Marginson, S., and Rhoades, G. (2002). Beyond National States, Markets and Systems of Higher Education: A Glonacal Agency Heuristic. *Higher Education*, 43(3), pp. 281–309.

Meyer, J., Boli, J., Thomas, G., and Ramirez, F. (1997). World Society and the Nation-State. *American Journal of Sociology*, 103(1), pp. 144–181.

Meyer, J., Ramirez, F., Frank, D., and Schofer, E. (2007). Higher Education as an Institution. In: P. Gumport, ed., *Sociology of Higher Education: Contributions and their Contexts*. 1st ed. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 187–221.

Mountford-Zimdars, A. (2014). Are Admissions Models for Undergraduate study Converging among Highly Selective Universities in England and the US?. In: S. Pickard, ed., *Higher Education in the UK and US: Converging University Models in a Global Academic World?*. 1st ed. Leiden: BRILL, pp. 91–112.

Nelson, A., and Wei, I. Eds., (2012). *The Global University: Past, Present, and Future Perspectives*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Pickard, S. Ed., (2014). *Higher Education in the UK and US: Converging University Models in a Global Academic World?*. Leiden: BRILL.

Rothkopf, D. (2008). *Superclass: The Global Power Elite and the World they are Making*. 1st ed. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Shavit, Y., Arum, R., Gamoran, A., and Menachem, G. Eds. (2007). *Stratification in Higher Education: A comparative study*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Sklair, L. (2001). *The Transnational Capitalist Class*. Oxford: Blackwell.
Slaughter, S., and Rhoades, G. (2000). The Neo-Liberal University. *New Labor Forum*, 6, pp. 73–79.
Stevens, M. (2007). *Creating a Class: College Admissions and the Education of Elites*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
Stevens, M., and Roksa, J. (2011). The Diversity Imperative in Elite Admissions. In: L. Stulberg and S. Weinberg, eds., *Diversity in American Higher Education: Toward a more Comprehensive Approach*. 1st ed. New York: Routledge, pp. 63–73.
Turner, R. (1960). Sponsored and Contest Mobility and the School System. *American Sociological Review*, 25(6), pp. 855–867.
Vandrick, S. (2011). Students of the New Global Elite. *TESOL Quarterly*, 45(1), pp. 160–169.
Warikoo, N., and Fuhr, C. (2014). Legitimating Status: Perceptions of Meritocracy and Inequality among Undergraduates at an Elite British University. *British Educational Research Journal*, 40(4), pp. 699–717.

Jonathan Z. Friedman is a doctoral candidate in International Education at New York University. His current research draws from cultural, organizational, and critical theories to examine the globalization of higher education in the United States, UK and worldwide. His work has been published in *Higher Education Research and Development* and the *Journal of Studies in International Education*. He is also part of a long-term research project housed at the US Social Science Research Council (SSRC) examining the way American universities organize and produce knowledge about the rest of the world.