CHAPTER 2

Where Have All the Elites Gone? Cultural Transformation of Elitism in the Schooled Society

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Societal elites, their selection and legitimation, have been connected to elite forms of formal education for centuries across a wide variety of cultures. Understanding the continuing changing relationship is essential for the study of education and society. At the same time, the relationship between education and society is fundamentally changing, a phenomenon of cultural power resulting in sweeping demographic shifts in who attends schooling and the length of academic careers (Baker 2014). Ubiquitous massive growth in schooling, now well into the university level, and the spread of a culture of education create what can be called a "schooled society"—a new type of society where dimensions of education reach into, and change, nearly every facet of human life, including a profound change in the social construction of not only selection to the elite, but of the essential qualities of elitism. An older bifurcation between elite and non-elite schooling breaks down and the narratives used to legitimise such a separation have also been called into question. Elites, and particularly

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elitism, however, are not abolished in the schooled society; instead, they are fundamentally recast within the institutional logic of education. And with the world scope of the education revolution, this transformation is spurred on by the internationalisation of education for elite positions, which in turn lends itself to intensify processes of globalisation affecting the economy and individual and group subjectivities.

This chapter briefly considers what the rise of the schooled society means for the social construction of elites and elitism, and the future of elite education. Addressed are three interrelated questions: In what way has the deepening institutional logic of education *replaced* former processes of elite formation? Beyond the changing nature of elite formation, is there also a *fundamentally new* social construction of the meaning of elite? And what is the *future* of educational formation of elites and the social construction of elitism in the schooled society as it becomes increasingly more international in its reach? The intention here is not to present a definitive argument, but rather to use the perspective of education as a robust institution to raise insights for the continued study of societal elites, their education, and the internationalisation of a new form of elitism. While where possible empirical evidence is presented, the proposed perspective awaits future research for fuller verification. Before this, a brief description of changes brought on by the education revolution sets the stage.

The New Institution of Education

Simply put, the education revolution has resulted in major shifts in school attendance and educational attainment throughout the world over approximately the past 150 years. These changes are obvious in the demography of education as successive birth cohorts experienced increasing enrolment rates to the point that contemporary participation in primary and secondary education is fully normative, legally compulsory, and valued by families and nation-states alike. Importantly for the issue here, expanding enrolments in postsecondary institutions have grown apace, with over a fifth of the world's entire youth cohort attending some form of higher education, plus graduate education grows as well (Schofer and Meyer 2005). In the academic year 2006–2007, for instance, the entire American higher education system awarded one graduate degree for every two bachelor's degree granted (US Department of Education 2008). Since the early 2000s, the USA has witnessed the highest rate of increases in individuals earning advanced degrees: over

the past decade new PhDs grew by 45% and master's degrees by 43%, and trends in Northern Europe and North America are increasingly mirrored worldwide (US Census Bureau 2012).

Less obvious than the demography of schooling is the far-reaching cultural impact of the education revolution, first occurring in Western society and now worldwide (Baker 2014). This has fashioned a new institution of education, the intensification of which is responsible for changes in actions towards schooling by individuals, nations, and world society. The education revolution is a cultural phenomenon more than a material or political one, although it has major material and political consequences. Widespread education in a postindustrial society creates cultural ideas about new types of knowledge, expanded types of experts, new definitions of personal success and failure, a new workplace and conception of jobs, and new definitions of intelligence and human talent. At the same time, educational achievement and degree attainment have come to dominate social stratification and social mobility, superseding and delegitimising forms of status attainment left over from the past. Functioning to construct far more of society than the reproduction of status, the global impact of formal education on postindustrial society has been so extensive that it can be argued that mass education is a founding social revolution of modernity (Meyer 1977; Parsons 1971).

Another consequence of a maturing education revolution is unprecedented historical change in the content, intent, and organisation of schooling. Formal education, including the university, has become more cognitive in content, less vocational in intent, more focused on broad human development, and increasingly merged with universalistic ideas about knowledge. For example, while all education at any point in history involves cognition, a dominant curricular trend of the schooled society constructs and celebrates a particular set of cognitive skills and elevates them to a heightened status. Academic skills, particularly higher-order thinking capabilities, are equated with intelligence as a generalisable skill becoming the explicit overarching epistemological leitmotif of modern education, and is assumed to be useful for all types of human activities and general development of the individual (e.g., Baker et al. 2015). So too, the earlier education goal of schooling for specific vocational preparation, usually as the working-class part of a bifurcated education system, gives way to general academic training for most students including mass access to what was once considered elite knowledge and training in science, mathematics, and advanced language skills. The three now make up the cornerstone

of the mass school curriculum from the earliest grades on, while older notions of elitist classicalism die out. Also, the emerging epistemology of the education revolution assumes that all knowledge has universalistic qualities, and the university is chartered to generate, organise, and apply its authoritative-universal science and rationalised scholarship to everything (Lenhardt 2005). Lastly, scientific knowledge based on universalism comes to include humans themselves, with ideas of equality of humans and societies, constructed along the norms of universal social justice; all are overarching themes that have been widely distributed over the past 50 years through the schooling curricula globally, regardless of the cultures of nations (Frank and Meyer 2007; Suárez and Bromley 2012).

The education revolution comprises one of the largest societal projects of institutionalisation in the modern period (Baker 2014). And from this historical process comes profound transformation of elites and elitism in postindustrial society. Prior to the coming of the schooled society, special elite education, embodied in a recognised set of schools, verified and legitimated elite status of individuals who usually (although not necessarily always) originated from a stratum of elite families. An outgrowth from older aristocratic and classical forms of education, these schools represented an upper caste of organisations with a much celebrated and maintained qualitative difference from all other educational institutions (Marrou 1956). A caste system in this sense describes immutable groups of schools and universities based on nominal elitism. The breaking down and then restructuring of each dimension of this former order is caused and legitimated by the new robust institution of education. As described below, while subtle, this shift is transformative. It is not that elite institutions vanish in the schooled society; rather, the social strategies to remain (and gain) elite status relentlessly move towards educational parameters, making them operate much less as a caste explicitly reproducing an elite stratum, but as a school or university, among many, who strive for broader legitimation through "educational excellence."

From Elites to Elite Positions

Perhaps the most sweeping change brought on by the education revolution is a shift away from elitism as an enduring "ascriptive-status" of a particular individual to a formal elite position filled by an individual with specific educationally created and defined social charters codified in advanced academic degrees. And generally this is a status lasting only for

an individual's tenure in such a position, usually now as a career in large complex organisations. This is changing both the meaning of elite and the qualities of actual elites themselves.

A shift from ascriptive status, through birth into clan, family, or ruling strata, to what is often called "achieved status" is a time-honoured sociological observation about the central historical transition from traditional to modern and then postmodern societies. Unfortunately the term "achieved" has always been misleading, overstressing an image of general merit and individual differences. A more accurate formulation would be "educationally derived status." Put this way, education becomes the provider of skills, sensibilities, and ideologies that enable placement into formal elite positions, regardless of family origin. Also a process often accompanied by overt attempts to break older ascriptive patterns: think efforts to reduce gender inequalities in education in recent decades. Thus formal education creates and defines parallel skills and "ways of doing and thinking about" sets of tasks in elite positions (Baker 2014). While obvious, on a deeper level this arrangement erodes education as chiefly *reproducing* elite status and, in its place, considers education as *constructing* the content of elitism of positions and defines legitimate access to them. This is evidenced by two empirical trends in postindustrial society.

First, the direct influence education performance increases as the reproductive influence of education declines. For example, among the general population there is considerable evidence that intergenerational influence of family origin on adult status attainment has completely vanished among the growing number of individuals completing the BA (i.e., first university degree), and has substantially declined among individuals with a secondary school degree in the USA, as well as a score of other extensively schooled societies (e.g., Hout 1988). Of course there remains the sway of one's origin on educational attainment, even up through higher education, but parental socioeconomic status is itself increasingly a function of earlier educational attainment. Consequently, over just several generations, education has thoroughly saturated intergenerational mobility. Thus once one is in the higher education arena, success becomes based chiefly on educational outcomes, such as better academic performance, majors declared (subjects studied), and perhaps the influence of educational and prestige differences among higher education institutions (but probably not as a upper caste of schools, see below). This logic applies throughout the system, from lower to upper social destinations, including elite positions. And considerable empirical research indicates the same

process is happening across many nations (Breen and Jonsson 2007; Breen and Luijkx 2007).

Second, a major facet of postindustrial society highly relevant to elites is the growing density of formal organisations—both profit-seeking such as large corporations and non-profit such as multinational agencies, the state, larger non-government organisations (NGOs)—to a degree unknown in traditional and early modern societies (Drori et al. 2006). Internationalised and interconnected with one another and operating in a similar bureaucratic and functional fashion, these formal large organisations claim involvement in all kinds of human activity, including the economy and other sectors. And it has long been observed that education significantly raises capacity for creation and expansion of rationalised formal organisations. Therefore, within some of these organisations are the most (and most plentiful) elite positions in contemporary society. The transformation from an ascribed to an educationally constructed elite occurs through educational effects (including credentials, but surely also cognitive resources, communication capabilities, psychological empowerment, technical vocabularies, and world orientations) on individuals who become elite organisational actors. Additionally, the internationalisation of educational and organisational forms can be argued to further reinforce this process.

Three dimensions support this embedding of elite and elitism in large formal organisations. First, educational sensibilities are embedded into organisational culture and structure. There are several aspects to this. One is extensive "personnel professionalism" permeating throughout modern organisations. Leading core professionals of the organisation holding elite positions are educated and formally credentialed. Importantly too, this same logic permeates the entire organisational structure. Education provides people with the skills to function in the modern organisation, and it certifies them as such, and this occurs on a global and highly fluid scale. Educational credentials control access to sets of activities and management responsibilities inside formal organisations, and a hierarchy of academic degrees has become thoroughly blended with the internal hierarchy of the modern organisation. With the notion of personnel professionalism comes a workplace based on the idea of personnel as responsible individuals who are "thinking and choosing actors, embodying professional expertise and capable of rational and creative behavior" (Luo 2006: 230). All of which are qualities that have become embedded in the education systems as attributes expected of everyone, and most certainly of those in elite positions.

Another dimension is intensive education-led rationalisation of ever more internal aspects of organisations. The rise of accounting and auditing, fundraising, elaborate legal contracts, corporate (or in the public sector, organisational) social responsibility, human relations, and strategic planning are just a few examples of now heavily rationalised internal activities of formal organisations, in which an expert culture reigns supreme, and with corresponding university-based scholarship. An underlying core belief in the schooled society is that these rationalised domains are to be trusted only to educationally credentialed individuals in university-created areas of expertise with accompanying special knowledge bases (e.g., Fogarty 1997). Instead of being solely a "natural outcome" of organisational need, in actuality intensified rationalised internal activities are supported and increased as a function of the education revolution. Accountants, auditors, fundraisers, legal staff, corporate social responsibility experts, directors of planning, and so on are increasingly educationally credentialed professionals assumed to have similar educationally accredited operational approaches and common understandings. And these individuals also consider themselves as a specific kind of professional first and an employee of a specific organisation second. By the same logic, each type of profession captures, and legitimately holds, control over certain sets of activities within organisations, often with major resource and strategic implications. Accountants, for instance, are by virtue of a specific university degree considered special experts with an accepted standard and up-to-date technical method and image of organisational process used for controlling accounting functions and budget flows. Thus, although these new organisational professionals are embedded within organisations, their educational credentials with accompanying authoritative charters transcend any particular organisation (Drori et al. 2006; Shanahan and Khagram 2006). Elite positions are then embedded within the same professional matrix of the formal organisation and follow similar rules of selection and educational verification.

The last dimension of the educational-organisational symbiosis is an increasing horizontal authority structure of organisations. Authority and responsibility, a hallmark of elitism, are far more widely distributed within organisations than in the past, thus "the relative authority, autonomy, and degree of responsibility for people and things"—in short, managerial skills of various types—grow as parts of job descriptions across occupations (Howell and Wolff 1991: 488). Unsurprisingly, in many current organisations, accepted managerial styles and the rhetoric supporting them contain

considerable reference to teacher-like mentorship and an education-like development of employees for the future well-being of the economic enterprise (Scott and Meyer 1991). In the schooled society, the cultural power of education as an institution makes an educational process a prominent model for the workplace, instead of the reverse, as traditional images of schooling and capitalism would have it.

Through education's direct influence on social mobility, the growing educational-professional rationalisation of the formal organisation, and the educational social construction of work reshape elitism. The elite increasingly becomes people holding elite positions in major organisations, such as multinational corporations, multilateral agencies of world society, organisations of the nation-state, religion, and civil society; all where the content, specific authoritative know-how and access to those positions is increasingly developed within the institutional logic of education, particularly the university. And elite qualities of positions expand within this arrangement even as elite status becomes less indelible for individuals. Legitimately achieved educational credentials are irrevocable and necessary for elite positioning within the powerful formal organisation, while at the same time elite status of the individual becomes ephemeral and evermore tied to tenure in such a position. All of this is, of course, Weber's confluence of rationalisation and bureaucracy, but with the additional insight that by the end of the twentieth century the cultural matrix and driving force behind this convergence is the education revolution. The demographic and cultural expansion of the university rationalises and defines elitism within authoritative professionalised occupations within the intensifying formal organisation.

This is not to suggest that economic resources and political power are no longer relevant. Rather, they themselves are recast in terms of organisations with varying resources, control, and power. Elite positions controlled through educational performance and credentials is a whole system by which educational degrees become the main legitimate route to power and access to resources within an increasingly professionalised and formally organised society. The culture of education has been directly interjected into the growing personnel professionalism of large formally organised, white-collar workplaces. The schooled society makes educational credentials ever more dominant, not only for individuals in elite positions but also in how the prodigious resources and riches from a technological world are legitimately divided up, or, in short, for the very meaning of elitism itself. This is already occurring in parts of

the world where the schooled society is most developed, and given the internationalising influence and spread of the education revolution, it is likely to occur worldwide. Educationally constructed elitism lends an international homogenisation to the qualities of elite positions and the content of those roles.

Chartering Elitism

The central role the university plays in the social construction of ideologies is well demonstrated. The university has become a strong primary institution, producing and granting authority to a considerable number of the ideas about the nature of knowledge, individuals, humankind, and indeed the entire cosmos—all of which form the bedrock cultural beliefs and values that drive the schooled society to ever larger proportions worldwide (Meyer et al. 2008). In short, this picture is one of the university producing not only new knowledge through scholarship and research but also, and crucially so, the very ideology and beliefs that underpin the experienced reality of modern society. The Western form of the university has come to have a powerful charter to define and connect knowledge production with degree creation, thereby interjecting its authoritative ideologies into ever more aspect of daily life (Baker 2014).

It is not that universities do all of this cultural construction in some heavy-handed fashion. When universities mechanically try to shape people's everyday worlds directly, they are inept and indeed usually are ineffectual. Their power is subtler but extremely pervasive. This argument then should not be confused with proclaiming that because the university trains elites, it is a powerful institution passing information down from on high. Part of the story of course, yet this image, being overly functional and grandiloquent in tone, confuses the charter to train elites with elite status itself: the university is neither omnipotent nor conspiratorial. Nevertheless the cultural meanings produced by the university, often employing the methods of science and relying on an epistemological mandate that rests on original methods of scholarship having deep roots in Western culture, are deeply embedded within the everyday life. And given the universal charter of university-generated and verified knowledge, this process is bound up in growing international networks of knowledge production. A process further reinforced by growing privilege to ideas of internationalism within the university's curriculum and its ideologies about truth claims (e.g., Frank and Gabler 2006).

Increasingly then, elitism—the chartering of what is elite—becomes defined as the entitlement to wield such authoritative ideologies (think: high-form legal, scientific, and financial versions), verified (and learned) of course, through the holding of advanced academic degrees. The earning of a degree becomes crucial, more salient than the particular institution in which it is earned. There are still prestige hierarchies among universities, but these pale in comparison to degree attainment. Qualities of elitism conform to the primacy of universalised knowledge and academic degrees, thus producing a self-reinforcing dynamic. The result of this dynamic charter is the creation of reigning meanings in society, reinforced by the now legions of university-trained and degree-certified experts who make up so much of contemporary society, and who in turn perpetuate the legitimacy of university-generated knowledge.

Therefore legitimate access to elite positions and their charter changes in the schooled society as academic credentials (degree completion) come to dominate. Traditional forms of access to an elite—such as sinecure, simony, tutelage, praetorship, personal letters of reference and introduction, family membership, "traditional school tie" (attendance at a particular institution), rectitude, patronage, ownership, and position in a social stratum—are steadily de-legitimatised and, in some cases, made formally illegal. It is true that certain universities carry older elite status and there is still considerable reproduction of family status among some parts of the university system worldwide, but if the trends described here persist, one prediction would be that access to elite would become less tied to these institutions acting as an upper caste with attendance, not performance, the key quality. A movement away from this caste form is what the social mobility findings described above suggest.

From Elite Education to Prestigious Education

The above changes correspondingly transform elite education. Older caste barriers symbolically separating elite and non-elite forms of education erode as education evolves more into the form of a market, a prestige hierarchy. This is partially evident in changes within old elite institutions themselves. For instance, prestigious institutions now routinely have processes to admit students explicitly from outside elite strata and provide them with financial assistance. And in recent years this trend has grown in size from a token to a significant commitment to distinguish themselves as schools and universities in the business of creating, not reproducing, an elite.

While a prestige hierarchy can be mistaken for only a slightly modified caste system, in fact they have very different underlying logics yielding different structures. The education revolution has opened up what were once elite sectors of education for increasing proportions of successive birth cohorts. What is often referred to as "mass" education is a bit of a misnomer: better might be "normative" education, meaning that the education careers once reserved for reproducing elites become an assumed norm of education for many, and hence the ongoing worldwide expansion of university enrolment and degree attainment. Instead of nominally bounded-off elite schools, this lends to a trajectory, or a kind of market in quality across educational institutions. The quality differences are assumed and can be reflected in costs of admission, yet the essence of quality becomes more difficult to identify beyond reputation. Thus over the course of the education revolution elite education is less supported by the assumptions of a rigid caste system.

The fluidity of a prestigious market of educational opportunities is a weaker social form of elite maintenance than a caste system. This is evidenced by the historical accounts of universities taking long jumps in prestige thus undermining the image of enduring elite charters. Cases like that of New York University's rise from a lower-status institution for students chiefly from the surrounding city to an aspiring world-class research university are relatively numerous (Kirp 2009). Even Stanford University's reputation as being among the world's very best was a post–World War II product of some happenstance. And the same is occurring through governmental "excellence" schemes for inventing elite universities in a number of nations. This process is one likely cause of the above noted fact that completion of particular advanced degrees far outweigh association (just attendance) with prestigious universities, even though the latter was once a viable verification of membership in the elite. A prestigious hierarchy of education increases competition among families and students for elite positions. The decline of "sponsored" placement in an upper caste of schools also means that crucial points of competition are extended over the length of the whole school career, even starting with pre-schooling in some nations with advanced schooled societies (Turner 1960). This is not to imply that the world will instantly become meritocratic. There is always reproductive pressure on education opportunity, and with the public pressure for more access to better education, private interests generate counter-pressure. The point is that increasingly merit itself is defined educationally, and the education process at the upper levels moves away from a caste system of institutions.

This trend will likely continue because of its cultural support. Contemporary negative attitudes towards exclusionary castes versus more accepted ones about markets in postindustrial society are easily applied to prestige hierarchies of schooling as well. With some likeness to a market, the latter enjoy a degree of legitimation while old elite castes of schools become less valid, even taking on a forbidden image of antiqued elitism. This intensifies the degree to which prestige is defined as general academic quality instead of ascriptive reproduction.

The Future of Elite Education

The decline of segmented traditional forms of elite education will likely continue with the educational revolution. Although remnants remain, increasingly they become less legitimate or must reinvent themselves along new meanings in line with larger institutional trends in education (Gaztambide-Fernández 2009). No doubt some observers will be tempted to consider this a move towards a greater meritocratic process, while others will be equally tempted to criticise such a conclusion as naïve. Either way, what is overlooked is that education takes a direct constructive role in elite position creation in part because the former has come to be the legitimate form of social stratification. By shaping a culture where educational performance, reflected by academic degrees, is widely believed to be the dominant arbitrator of merit, elite formation through education becomes compatible with such a social construction.

Whether or not the education revolution creates "true merit" among elites is not the right sociological question to ask. Just as popular attempts to judge how much family-origin ascription remains is secondary to the larger issue of qualitative change. Much like celebrated non-educational realms of merit operating in past societies, such as military prowess, superior physical ability, or masterful craftsmanship, the main point is that educational ability is constructed as the supreme arbitrator of merit in the contemporary schooled society, and the saliency of educational credentialing and associated charters to impose authoritative knowledge, usually within a highly organisational context, enacts this belief. Over a relatively short sociological period, education has approached worldwide acceptance as the one appropriate and legitimate playing field on which to compete for merit, for both low and high positions. This normative belief could perhaps be the education revolution's furthest-reaching and most salient cultural product so far. And of course, this new institutional logic permeates elites and elitism and will continue to define both into the future.

The recasting of elite education by the education revolution also suggests new avenues for scholarship. All of the changes to elite education reflected in the questions considered here are in need of assessment and new scholarship. While the idea of an elite is still useful sociologically, its meaning and structure are undergoing transformations that require a new perspective. The shift to a prestige hierarchy is in some ways obvious, but its deeper implications for the top of the hierarchy and its products await future study. With the major interest in inequality, a lion's share of research focuses on the disadvantaged. The other end of the spectrum is rarely systematically studied, except to note that these are the winners of an unequal system. (The research projects summarised in the current volume being notable exceptions.) The transformation of social mobility and social structure through the effects of a robust institution of education means that advantage and privilege and its terms of legitimation likely have, and will continue, to evolve as well. The educational transformation of elites and elitism is a phenomenon ripe for future sociological investigation, and particularly given the global nature of the processes outlined here, a special emphasis should be placed on the growing internationalisation of education and elitism.

Humans are increasingly citizens embedded in a world society constituted of empowered individuals—empowered in large part by formal education (Baker 2014; Frank and Meyer 2007). This transformation applies to those in elite positions as much as to all others. The education revolution does not end the importance of the question of the relationship among schooling, society, and elite formation; rather, it offers a more dynamic and central sociological investigation.

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