The 'Other' London effect: the diversification of London's suburban grammar schools and the rise of hyper-selective elite state schools.

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Abstract

This paper examines the rise of a new elite of 'super-state' schools in London, revealing a growing divide within the state sector which problematizes claims that the capital is a 'hotspot' for social mobility (Social Mobility Commission, 2016). Although recent research has revealed a 'London effect' in which students in the capital on Free School Meals out-perform their peers in other regions (Greaves et al., 2014), inequalities between London's schools in access to elite universities have been overlooked. Drawing on a case study of a suburban London grammar school, 'King Henry's School', I show how ethnic-minority suburbanization has combined with an institutional strategy to compete with elite private schools. Strategies of selection have been mobilised alongside elements of elite 'gentlemanly' educational culture in order to re-position the school within the hierarchy of London's schools. The result is a hyper-selective school which provides a conduit to elite universities for upwardly mobile British-Asian students. I show that this strategy has strong parallels with the school's attempts in the early twentieth century to compete with London's fee-paying 'public' schools. The continuing symbolic value of 'traditional' forms of elite educational culture to a school seeking to re-position itself within the field reflects deep structural patterns of inequality in English education. To understand how apparent improvements in social mobility can sit alongside deepening inequalities between state schools, there is a need for a historical sociological approach that takes account of long-term processes of institutional change is required (Savage, 2009; Inglis, 2014).

Key words: London, grammar schools, social mobility, ethnic minorities, suburbanization, elite education.

Introduction

In a reversal of the negative discourses surrounding education in London over the 1980s and 1990s (Kerckhoff et al., 1996: 78-79), the media and academics have recently noted the high attainment of London's students from deprived backgrounds (Wyness, 2011; Cook, 2012). Ethnicity has been identified as a key element in explaining this performance relative to elsewhere in the country (Burgess, 2014). Since the creation of the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission under the Coalition Government, this 'London effect' has been linked directly to the politics of social mobility. Most recently this research has generated a 'social

mobility index' collating a variety of education and employment-related indicators of attainment and socio-economic disadvantage, with London unsurprisingly appearing as a 'hotspot' for social mobility (Social Mobility Commission, 2016). This has been challenged by Friedman and Macmillan (2017) who show that London in fact has lower upward mobility than many other areas across the UK. In this paper, I wish to further problematize the narrative of London as a hotspot for social mobility. I argue here that alongside improvements in the attainment of London's socio-economically disadvantaged students, the past three decades have seen deepening inequalities as a small sub-set of elite state schools pulls away from the rest.

The literature surrounding the London effect and the Social Mobility Commission more broadly has not directly addressed the rise of elite state schools since the 1980s. It has been acknowledged for some time that at a national scale there is a sub-grouping of very high-performing state comprehensive schools that tend to have fewer students on Free School Meals (Sutton Trust, 2006; Sutton Trust, 2013). There has also been increased media interest in London's 'super-state' schools which are increasingly competing with the private sector on attainment and, as we will see, on places at Oxford and Cambridge (Herrmann, 2014; Nelson, 2016). The history of how these schools have achieved their positions within the hierarchy of London schools has been overlooked. In some places, patterns of rising attainment combine with patterns of intense gentrification leaving working-class Londoners excluded and 'displaced' from increasingly sought-after inner London academies (Butler et al., 2013), whilst simultaneously seeing an increasing presence of ethnic-minority middle classes in the suburbs (Butler and Hamnett, 2011). This upwardly-mobile suburban ethnic-minority middle class is a key focus of this paper. Rather than framing the success of ethnic-minority students within a broader policy discourse of social mobility that tends not to examine inequalities between schools, I want to explore how trajectories of ethnic-minority students into elite universities are in some cases linked to the re-creation of an elite sub-field of state schools. In using 'field', I am referring to Bourdieu's (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) theory of field as a multi-dimensional space in which actors compete for dominance, their position within the field being dependent on stocks of capital. More specifically, I am drawing on Bourdieu's (1996: 198) work on the (sub-)field of the *grandes écoles* where elite French universities adopt 'a set of collective and individual strategies aimed at the accumulation of symbolic

capital' to assert their position. These institutional strategies are central to students' everyday experience of schooling in an elite suburban grammar school.

Drawing on the case study of an Outer London selective grammar school, I examine how new trajectories of upward social mobility are unfolding in London's suburbs which are diversifying some traditionally white Outer London grammars. However, in the school in question, 'King Henry's Grammar School for Boys' (KHS), the context for these educational trajectories are taking place is a 30-year institutional project to return the school to the glory it once had as a high-attaining inter- and post-war state grammar school. Restoring selection first by interview and then from 1994 with the re-introduction of a selective entry exam was central to this project. This process also quite explicitly involved the re-creation of a 'gentlemanly' elite educational culture (Anderson, 2007) with a particular focus on Oxbridge entry and elite sports. This conservative cultural project represents what Stuart Hall (1987: 17-19) described as the Thatcherite project of 'regressive modernization' – modernizing society by restoring certain elements of the culture of 'eminent Victorians'. From this perspective, the forms of 'social mobility' apparent in Outer London grammar schools in London in the 2010s must be understood as tied into a set of longer-term institutional, urban and political developments that have exacerbated inequalities between schools.

Adopting a historical sociological lens: the lineages of elite educational culture and the re-creation of elite state schools

In adopting a historical approach, I am responding to recent criticisms (Savage, 2009; Inglis, 2014), of sociology's lack of historical framing or understanding of long-term social processes. Inglis' (2014: 5) warns that '[w]hen historical consciousness is weak, as it is now in British sociology, contemporary society's self-understandings are not challenged but uncritically reproduced.' Much of the formative early work in the sociology of education had an explicitly historical approach (Banks, 1955; Floud and Halsey, 1956). Particularly important here is Banks' work which traced the development of the secondary school over the nineteenth century into the mid-twentieth century and the dominance of the academic curriculum. Despite this, in studies in the contemporary sociology of education, history often remains primarily a question of describing the context to the study in question. Indeed, this has been a particular problem for the policy literature and the sociological research funded as

part of the 'social mobility' agenda of the last two UK governments. Whilst reference is often made to the persistent disproportionate career success of private school and Oxbridge graduates, little attention is given to the political history which has fostered these historic institutional inequalities (Shrosbree, 1988). Simultaneously, the literature's concentration on the 'London effect' when examining the causes of rising attainment amongst working-class London students overlooks the creation of new forms of inequalities between and within schools (Kulz, 2017). Whilst attention is focussed consistently on the improvements or perceived 'deficiencies' of students from marginalized socio-economic or ethnic backgrounds, the actions of elite state schools such as KHS are ignored.

The re-creation of these elite state schools forms part of a broader 'circularity' within current education policy, which seems to be restoring the institutional framework of the early educational state (Ball, 2012: 89). In a historical analysis of the field of public schools in the late nineteenth century, Leinster-Mackay (1981) argued that many schools operated in the intermediate position of 'quasi-public schools', in between the pinnacle of elite, predominantly boys', private secondary schools and less prestigious, often less wealthy, grammar schools or council-run schools. Banks (1955: 220-223) similarly described the boundary between selective, state-funded grammars and the fee-paying public schools in the mid-twentieth century as partially blurred. Over the last thirty years, London has increasingly seen the rise of a similar intermediate set of elite state schools, far distant from even the increasingly high-attaining inner London academies drawing ever closer to the private sector. I am arguing that within the field of London's schools, at an institutional level, there has been the re-creation of a group of schools which sit between the state-maintained and the fee-paying private sector.

To explore these historical parallels, I will focus on how KHS has twice used forms of 'gentlemanly' elite educational culture as part of a strategy to re-position itself within the dominant sub-field of elite schooling in London, firstly in the period from the late nineteenth century to the 1940s and second between the 1980s and the present day. These two periods are addressed in the first and second sections of the analysis below. Latterly, this 'gentlemanly' culture has been adapted to a very different, ethnically diverse suburban

context. Moreover, in the second period extreme forms of selection are equally if not more important to the project of re-positioning the school after its 'difficult' period as a comprehensive from 1971 to 1994. The practices adopted by the school indicate the restoration of a particular set of elite educational values which have never completely lost their symbolic value within the English field of education. I will argue that social mobility in contemporary London schools must be placed in this longer historical frame in order to see the deeper persistence and re-creation of these institutional hierarchies and cultures.

In the final section of the paper, I explore how these structural histories of the field of elite education permeate the experience of young upwardly mobile ethnic-minority students in elite state schools like KHS. Several papers have recently highlighted the use of selective schooling by British South-Asian families (Abbas, 2007; Shah et al., 2010) and their targeting of other high-attaining state schools in suburban locations (Goff, 2008; Butler and Hamnett, 2010). In the latter case, this strategy around schooling was associated with strategies of residential re-location from inner-city neighbourhoods to the suburbs. These analyses of suburban aspiration to upward mobility through housing and schooling have not related contemporary experiences to earlier episodes of upwardly mobile working-class students attending suburban grammar schools. Earlier distinctive class-based patterns of socio-spatial journeys from home to school, what Ball et al. (1995) termed 'circuits of schooling', have important modern-day resonances. Though there is no simple equating of race and class in now very different urban and educational settings, these circuits allowing spatial and social mobility into elite educational spaces speak to deeper historical tendencies and patterns within English elite education. It is a reminder that the mode of sponsored mobility into elite education in the UK was never completely abolished and that the conservative elite educational culture associated with it retains a powerful influence over English education (Turner, 1960). With the recent government's attempt to re-introduce grammar schools failing only due to a broader electoral defeat in June 2017, the story of King Henry's School's successful re-creation as an elite, selective grammar with a multi-ethnic intake bolsters the political and cultural myths surrounding selective schooling. These histories are thus key to understanding the contemporary experiences and politics of social mobility and social reproduction.

Data and methodology

This paper draws on my doctoral research which provided a broader mixed-methods analysis of the contemporary geography of elite and middle-class schooling in England (Gamsu, 2017). This work used social network analysis methods to highlight a cluster of private and elite state schools that dominate access to Oxbridge and other research-intensive UK universities. The quantitative analysis was complemented by case studies of individual schools, in which the data collection primarily involving focus groups with sixth form students and follow-up interviews with individual students and senior members of staff. Focus groups allowed me to draw out students' 'shared understandings' (Merryweather, 2010: 2.2) as well as differing experiences of school, home-school journeys, the communities they came from and their perceptions of how the school positioned itself. Four focus groups were undertaken giving a sample of 21 students in the final year in 2013-14. All students participating in focus groups completed a short questionnaire to provide basic details on their family background and university choices.

In the focus group sample, the largest group of students were the ten students of British-Indian heritage; there were five white-British students, while others were from Sri Lankan, Vietnamese, Chinese and Nigerian backgrounds. Nearly half of the students' parents had middle-class managerial or professional occupations (10 out of 21) with only two students from clear-cut working-class backgrounds. Mapping class categories based on occupational status to individuals from ethnic minority communities is not straight-forward (Modood, 2004; Archer and Francis, 2006). British social class categories and broad terms to describe ethnic-background such as British South-Asian, used here to denote students with families from the Indian sub-continent, or even 'British-Indian' do not necessarily reflect individuals' differentiated pre- and post-migration histories or the specific social and ethnic hierarchies and geographies lying behind these terms (Anthias, 2001; Poros, 2010). Despite these caveats, these demographics are similar to official data for the cohort of students that left the school four years earlier in 2009-10. Data for the 2009-10 cohort showed the school to be 25% white-British, 30% British-Indian and 45% NS-SEC 1-2 and a further 20% being from NS-SEC 3 (DfE and HESA, 2014). Of those students in NS-SEC 1-2 white-British students formed the largest group, but British-Indian students had a similar percentage of parents in middle-class occupations. Looking at data for the same cohort, of London's 19 grammar

schools, only four had students of colour in the majority, with two others being just over 50% white-British and the others all having much larger white majorities. However, these students would have entered the school in the early 2000s when London's suburbs were still undergoing the dramatic changes that saw these neighbourhoods become much more diverse (Johnston et al., 2015). It is thus likely that in the elite, high-performing London grammars described here, the ethnic-minority presence will increase in younger cohorts.

Whilst the qualitative analysis which follows primarily focusses on King Henry's School for Boys (KHS), I also discuss a stand-alone interview with a former student at another high-performing girls' grammar school which also has a substantial British South-Asian intake. This school, Henrietta Barnett (HBS), is not anonymized here as there was no interviewing at the school itself, unlike at KHS where anonymity was a condition of gaining access. To preserve the anonymity of KHS, some quotes from texts or sites relating to the school are not referenced.

King Henry's Grammar: establishing and asserting 'a public school spirit'

KHS was founded in the sixteenth century as a free grammar school for local boys in what was then a village 18 kilometres from the City of London. At the end of the nineteenth century as suburban development brought with it a commuting professional middle class, the school began to assert what the chair of the old boys' association described in his history of the school as a 'public school spirit'. This coincided with the period of establishment of what Honey (1977: 284-287) called the 'community' of public schools. During the nineteenth century period the rules of the field of elite schooling, which educational practices had cultural and symbolic value, were in flux, but by the late nineteenth century certain norms were beginning to crystallize: prefects, a selective sixth form, rugby union, chapel and founders' day ceremonies becoming the norm (Honey, 1977: 139-145). As a state-funded, council-controlled grammar school, KHS could not achieve the financial and administrative autonomy of the public schools. Nevertheless, the head between 1931 and 1961 aimed to 'do as well in producing good scholars, good athletes, *and* reliable gentlemen as schools of greater renown and greater advantages' (original emphasis). Note here the importance of the ideal of the 'gentleman' in a school which had a suburban white-collar intake, but was not for

the aristocratic or financial elite. A central element of the institutional mimicry of the practices of more established boys' public schools were aspects of pseudo-aristocratic 'gentlemanly' culture (Anderson, 2007). I would argue here that in attempting to re-position the school within the elite sub-field of London schools, firstly between the 1880s and 1940 and again after the 1980s, gentlemanly culture has retained a particular symbolic value. In the latter period this reflected the regressive cultural undertones of British education reform under Conservative governments of the 1980s and 1990s, underlining the preservation, though not without transformation, of certain forms of elite educational practices and culture which reflect the maintenance of deep structural inequalities.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century between the older fee-paying public schools and the newer state-run grammar schools lay an intermediate group, the 'quasi-public school[s]'(Leinster-Mackay, 1981). In Bourdieusian terms these schools operated at the margins of the dominant sub-field of elite schools. KHS arguably operated in this in-between category; writing in the 1970s the former head argued:

> They [the public schools] were the level, the standard that we [grammar school] Heads aimed to reach with our schools, and, by the time of the Second War, a number of us had pretty well done so. With a steadily increasing share in the Open Scholarships at Oxford and Cambridge, with a Blue here and there, and these were the criteria that counted in those days, with fixtures between the two kinds of school becoming more frequent, with camps and expeditions in common, we had heavily blurred the line of class (horrible word) demarcation, had quietly broken down old barriers, and […] one or two of the less well-placed independent schools were beginning to feel a serious draught because of our success.

Blurring the boundaries between the fully fee-paying 'public' schools and the state-funded grammars was a major effort, and involved important practices of institutional mimicry of the older 'public schools'. This entailed developing a sixth form, retaining as much autonomy as possible from local government, sharing activities and sporting fixtures with the private sector and winning university places, especially at Oxbridge. Sixth form expansion and sporting success were helped by the school's move in 1931 into a large 'Gothic Revival'

building surrounded by playing fields; school rebuilding and expansion were frequently necessary for London's elite schools during this period (Gamsu, 2016).

The larger building coincided with a period of increasing student numbers in the sixth form, and by 1939 the proportion of school students in the sixth was according to the head 'the largest of any school in the country that was not a fully recognized Public School.' The symbolic importance of the sixth form was underlined in the work of Reid and Filby (1982) who argued that the sixth form had its roots in the models created by Arnold and other nineteenth century public school reformers. This model of post-16 education was largely preserved by twentieth century education reform which left relatively unchanged the academic model of a highly selective school-within-a-school focussing on elite university access. The current hyper-selective sixth form has been crucial to the school's re-positioning within the elite sub-field of schools since the 1980s as will be explored below. Both this and the school's approach to sports suggest important parallels between institutional strategies for re-positioning within the field in both the early and late twentieth century.

Sporting success was a central strategy for the accumulation of symbolic capital within the field of elite schools in the late nineteenth century. As Honey (1977) argued sharing sporting fixtures with the older, historic elite boys' schools was considered an important marker of institutional prestige; he delineated a distinct relational hierarchy of public schools in the late nineteenth century by exploring these sporting fixtures. The head of KHS described with satisfaction beating Haberdasher's Aske Boys School, a public school in London's commuter suburbs, at rugby in 1939. This was particularly gratifying as the head of Haberdasher's had suggested the KHS first team might only be up to playing their second team. While this particular KHS head was in charge (1931-1961) he kept a running count of sporting successes noting rugby victories against fee-paying public schools in and around London, such as St Albans and Bancrofts as well as success at cricket, athletics and Eton Fives. Sporting performance was recorded alongside Oxbridge and other university successes as marking KHS's achievement in pushing into the sub-field of dominant elite London schools.

By the mid-twentieth century, the school had succeeded in breaking into the fringes of this sub-field with the head claiming that certain fee-paying public schools were beginning to 'feel the draught'. The school's conscious adoption of these strategies was complemented by the effects of the 1930s economic depression; the head also noted a rise after the 1930s in the number of boys coming into the school from private, fee-paying preparatory schools (traditionally leading to day or boarding 'public' schools) with parents being 'glad to use our cheaper but increasingly reputable services.' Despite these favourable conditions King Henry's was only able to afford re-building through greater state involvement with the council taking ownership of the school's buildings as well as increasing its representation on the governing board. This local council control would eventually lead to the abolition of grammar school selection within the school in 1971, as the area moved to become fully comprehensive.

The sociological importance of this history to contemporary life within the school now can be seen in the partial persistence of the 'criteria that count'. Institutional mimicry and re-positioning within the field are still based around the same markers of institutional prestige. The adoption of 'gentlemanly' sports, the focus on Oxbridge places – seen by grammar schools as the 'blue riband' of academic achievement (Anderson, 1995: 11), and the creation and expansion of the sixth form were central strategies for the school's accumulation of symbolic and cultural capital. As will become clear, KHS still judges itself by similar principles, adopted once again in its re-positioning in the dominant sub-field of London's elite schools in the twenty-first century. Despite these similarities the practices that are adopted and the context in which the school operates are very different as will now be explored. Nonetheless, the preservation of symbolic value of gentlemanly and other forms of elite educational culture and their mobilisation in a second attempt to re-position the school, reflect a deeply regressive conservatism in the culture of English elite education.

After the comprehensive period: practices of hyper-selection and the return of 'gentlemanly' values in a changing suburban context

The period of KHS as a non-selective comprehensive school seems to have undermined the culture and position that the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century heads had sought to

develop. In contrast to the detailed account of its royal sixteenth century roots on the school's website, there is a euphemistic description of the school's period as a comprehensive as 'the difficult period of reorganisation'. At the end of this period as a comprehensive, the school's current identity began to be formed. In an interview with the current assistant head, it was made clear that a deliberate re-construction of the grammar school ethos began with the new head's arrival in 1984. In this account, the school as a comprehensive had seen its popularity fall by the early 1980s, with poorly attended open days and inferior results. The new head set out to restore an ethos of 'manners and learning', referring to the original Elizabethan charter of the school, as a euphemism for strict discipline and a 'strong' pastoral ethos. Rising applications by the late 1980s coincided with the introduction of grant-maintained status in the 1988 Education Act, allowing opt-out from local council control. The school was an early adopter, using its new status to re-introduce selection, initially by interview and from 1994 using an entry exam. Grant-maintained status was not being used to form a new educational culture, but rather as a means of 'opting into the past' (Halpin et al., 1997). The institutional mimicry of elite public schools described above over the period from the late nineteenth century to the 1940s and explored again here from the 1980s formed part of a broader cultural regression which was central to the broader political project of the Conservative Party (Hall, 1987: 17-18). Grant-maintained status was a new form of school governance designed to weaken the local state whilst, in the case of KHS, simultaneously restoring an elitist, selective educational culture that had been challenged by comprehensive schooling.

By the early 1990s the school's attempt to re-position itself once again within the field of elite schools was already showing signs of success. It gained attention for its academic results, and as early as 1991 KHS was described in the national press as 'more like a public school' with 'omnipresent rugby'. Despite local resistance to the school's reintroduction of selection, echoing similar concerns expressed in the 1880s, its reputation steadily grew with the number taking the entrance exam for 180 places growing from 600 in 1994 to 2000 in 2014. Geographically, the de facto catchment area expanded dramatically as parents who would have gone private increasingly considered the school (interview with Assistant Head). This reflected substantial success in returning KHS to its former 'public school spirit[ed]' grammar school days.

The school has once again positioned itself on the blurred line between state and private sector, with sport again central to this process. As a former head boy (Simon, Focus Group 2) stated, the headmaster is 'really striving' to make links with prestigious schools, both private and other grammar, through extra-curricular activities such as debating and careers events. This is in notable contrast to interaction with the school's sister school a former girls' grammar which unlike KHS has remained comprehensive; students reported this as minimal. The school rugby team only plays private schools or other grammars:

> Jake: I think our school has a particular reputation that they try and keep up and they try and mix it with the private schools. I think they want to see themselves as a private school.
>
> (Focus Group 1, KHS)

Sport operates as a way of asserting status and belonging to a broader community of elite schools, and sharing their cultural baggage. Notably the school does not play football, preferring conventional 'elite' sports including Eton Fives, cricket and water polo. As the head implies in the Good Schools Guide (2014), rugby remains central to the project of creating gentlemen:

> 'Rugby serves boys so well. […] It has a gentlemanly ethos, of which I enormously approve.'

This emphasis of the role of sport as part of a broader socializing project to create 'gentlemen' strongly repeats the aims of the mid-twentieth century head. However, this elite male sporting culture is now divided along ethnic lines:

> Simon: Yeah there's more white people than Asians [that play rugby] and you look at the cricket team and it's just switched.
>
> (Focus Group 2, KHS)

These 'gentlemanly' sports now express racial divisions between white-British students, many of whom live locally, and British South-Asian students, who often live further from the school. These sporting divisions reflect the internal ethnic segregation within the school which will be returned to below in exploring students' journeys to school.

Both cricket and rugby have been emblematic of the broader historical role of 'public schools' in allowing the men of the British middle classes to attain the status of 'gentlemen' without acquiring landed titles, but by performing a set of cultural values relating to sport and academia (Honey, 1977: 225-229; Mangan, 2000). It is clear just how static certain criteria of 'membership' of the community of elite and middle-class schools are; restoring the school to its former grammar school status has involved replicating this historic elite male sporting culture. This institutional strategy is now inflected by the changing dynamics and cultural politics of the increasingly diverse residents of suburban Outer London. This 'gentlemanly ethos' represents a 'reworking' of traditional elite educational culture for the contemporary context (Griffiths et al., 2008: 207), but this reworked sporting culture still serves as a form of symbolic distinction for the school.

Whilst these elements of 'gentlemanly' culture provide important markers of symbolic capital and strengthen the school's position within the field, it is the rigid and rigorous forms of selection in operation at KHS which actually underpin its transformation. As noted above, the number of students sitting the entrance exam has risen dramatically in the 23 years since the eleven-plus form of selection was re-created. The ratio of nearly 12 students sitting the exam to one place at the school in 2015 allows the school to operate dramatic forms of selection on entry. This is reinforced by rigorous setting from year seven culminating in a system of internal exams and 'recommendations' from teachers regarding passage into the sixth form at 16. These highly selective processes to enter the sixth form may have their roots in the nineteenth century traditions of the public school (Reid and Filby, 1982), but at KHS they operate at an extreme pitch. With 165 of 180 students achieving the top grade of an A* in math at age 16 (Good Schools Guide, 2014), this is no guarantee that students will be able to study the subject at A-level. They must instead achieve high averages in internal exams sat regularly over the two years of GCSE study as well as teacher recommendation.[1] This process was described by parents in an online forum as a 'cull', designed to weed out weaker or less obedient students. This 'clinical, brutal effectiveness' (parent in online forum) aims to push KHS firmly into the range of the private sector in terms of results and sporting success, and in this it has clearly been successful. Here we can see the limits of the influence of 'gentlemanly culture', and whilst selection on entry to sixth form is a legacy of the history of the sixth form within the public school, the school's selection operates as a form of hyper-

selectivity. This ensures that the student body for the sixth form is highly rarefied, disciplined and academic providing the basis for success in winning places at elite universities.

For KHS, this rigid academic discipline functions to push the school into the elite sub-field of London schools, in which winning places at elite universities has key symbolic importance. These places are both a form of institutional distinction and a form of upward mobility for the students involved and there is clearly an alignment of familial aspiration with institutional success.[2] When institutions seek domination within the field, 'what counts is making others see and believe': this is the 'logic of symbolic capital' (Bourdieu, 1996: 200-201), and it is crucial for KHS to be seen by parents, students and other schools as a conduit to elite universities. Students reported a strong emphasis on only a small sub-set of Russell Group universities (Warwick, UCL, LSE, Bristol and Durham) and Oxbridge, with this seen very much as a normalized process by students:

> Simon: Naturally we have around 70 or 80 apply to Oxbridge and this year we got 37 offers.
>
> (Focus Group 2, KHS)

Given that nationally only 1 per cent of state-maintained school students gain places at Oxbridge, this number of offers is not 'natural' but completely exceptional. Important here is the concentration on a particular sub-set of institutions *within* the Russell Group. This suggests that KHS is effectively a feeder school for Wakeling and Savage's (2015) 'golden triangle' of universities (Oxbridge and London) and their close competitors (Durham, Bristol, Exeter), in which there was a concentration of graduates going on to attain elite or NS-SEC 1 occupations. For the significant middle-class British-Indian intake at KHS, these suburban ethnic-minority grammar circuits of education,[3] are also allowing the cementing of middle-class status through access to elite universities, while for working-class students of colour they enable as well as upward mobility, at least into university. Given what is known about low rates of acceptance for some ethnic-minority groups by elite UK universities (Shiner and Modood, 2002; Boliver, 2013) and the growing importance of accessing particular universities to ensuring class status (Boliver, 2011), these elite grammars have a dual role. They serve to both preserve a culture and form of elite English education, whilst they also

provide a conduit for BME students to traditionally white- and middle-class-dominated universities. Though upward mobility into elite universities does not mean the end of discrimination for ethnic minorities, this suburban grammar circuit certainly strengthens access to universities dominated by the largely white elite and established middle class.

Re-constructing the grammar school tradition has thus gone above and beyond the institutional position achieved by the mid-century headmaster. Despite huge educational changes, there is a deep ossification of cultural tropes and goals which have symbolic value for schools aspiring to elite positions within the field. These cultural forms retain their symbolic power in determining institutional position within the sub-field of London's elite schools whilst also functioning internally, structuring a particular school organization which supports this position. Neo-liberal school reform, as embodied by its proto-typical organizational forms as the grant-maintained school or the contemporary academy status, has not shifted the symbolic weight and value of particular sports. Nor has it challenged the academic capital a school gains in achieving Oxbridge acceptances, and the now even more extensive preparation and rigid forms of selection, setting and homework which KHS uses to achieve this. Rather, we see a re-framing of institutional forms of governance but also the maintenance of much of the structural dynamics of prestige and symbolic value which have historically under-pinned social reproduction through the English school system. For boys at KHS, it offers an educational trajectory into elite universities, but along extremely traditional lines. I now turn to examine how demographic changes in London's suburbs have begun to shift the school's intake, creating the new educational circuits of upward social mobility and social reproduction we have just discussed.

Shifting intakes: ethnic-minority grammar circuits and resilient logics of social mobility and reproduction in the suburbs…

The focus groups with boys at KHS took place in a small office on a long corridor filled with annual prefect photos stretching back to the 1930s. A walk down the corridor illustrates the changing ethnicity of prefects. Students of colour made a first appearance in the prefects' photo in 1987, gradually increasing in number until the mid-2000s when they became a substantial majority of an enlarged prefect body. In line with broader changes in suburbs

across British cities and particularly in London (Phillips, 1998; Muñoz, 2010; Butler and Hamnett, 2011), the suburban Indian and Sri-Lankan Tamil heritage communities of North London have expanded dramatically in the last twenty years (Brent Council, 2013). Since the mid-eighties, these communities and other minorities have gradually increased within the school's intake. Alongside the regressive transformation of the school from an institutional perspective, there has been a substantial demographic shift in the student body. In this section the dynamics of this comparatively recent circuits of schooling are examined and set in the context of broader historical patterns of social mobility and reproduction within London's schools and suburbs.

Butler and Hamnett's (2011: 113-118) work on East London describes how British-Asian patterns of suburbanization were strongly related to discourses of upward mobility and a desire for larger semi-detached properties. Whilst comparable parental interviews about housing choice were not possible here, Simon (Focus group 2, KHS) described how his parents lived in a flat in East London, moving to North-West London only when they 'had enough money'. This suburban shift in the population was borne out in a stand-alone interview with Chelvy, a former student at Henrietta Barnett girls' grammar school of Sri Lankan Tamil heritage. Chelvy described in detail returning to her primary school in Harrow for work experience and witnessing the complete transformation of its intake since her time as a student there; she reported her mother describing how many Sri Lankan Tamils moving from Germany or Sri Lanka now 'think Harrow's a really good place to bring up your kids.' There are clear parallels between this process of suburbanization, strongly linked to the upward social mobility of a recently arrived minority group and trends within London's Jewish community which in 1994 accounted for 10 per cent of the school's population (Sinclair, 1994). Krausz (1969) analysed in great depth how upward social mobility in the Jewish community was combined with residential movement from the East End and strong emphasis on university for their children with the latter seen as key to achieving middle-class status.

For some students, the process of suburbanization, combined with grammar school use, reflected a strong familial desire for upward social mobility. As Chelvy explained, 'They [her

parents] were always like, grammar school is the only way we're ever going to get forwards.'
As in Birmingham (Abbas, 2007), parents were highly invested in attaining a grammar school
place as a means of upward mobility for working-class families or cementing hard won
professional middle-class status (Phillips and Sarre, 1995). These associations between
suburban life and middle-class educational and professional aspiration are deeply rooted in
British social history (Banks, 1955: 4). Charles Booth described the development of the 'new
middle-class' in London's suburbs 'as the great social fact of today […] within their circle
religion and education find their greatest response […]' (Booth, 1902: 201. In Hapgood,
2000: 48-49). The combination of these three processes – the rise of new social formations,
residential change and schooling – is exactly what we are seeing in the case of KHS and
HBS. Alongside this rapid change in intake however, local white middle-class circuits of
education are still present.

The differences in locality of residence and distance travelled between local suburban white
middle-class students and their British South-Asian counterparts, who lived in more distant
and often less prestigious suburban areas, reveal another important parallel in patterns of
social mobility and grammar school attendance. Chelvy commented that 'my mum found out
through family, 'cos obviously in Harrow no one knows where Henrietta Barnett is unless
you go there or know someone who goes there.' Just as there are many post-war memories of
largely white working-class students' journeys to suburban grammar schools from inner-city
working-class neighbourhoods (Black-Hawkins, 2001; Hoggart, 2009; Galvani, 2010),
attending HBS or KHS means travelling far beyond the everyday geographical knowledge of
most British South-Asian families living in North-West London. Post-war working-class
students in grammar schools were a new, larger generation of non-middle-class students
making the socio-spatial journey 'upward' and, often, outward, to and through the grammar
school. These experiences are worth comparing directly.

The gruelling nature of the long commute was discussed at KHS with Anish (Focus Group 2),
who described how extra-curricular activities after school meant missing the special school
bus. Afterwards it was 'a *trek* [original emphasis] getting home. Over two hours.' In contrast,
whilst interviewing in the school I witnessed a white student calling home in the reception
having forgotten his swimming kit. He told his mother 'Don't worry, you don't need to rush,

PE only starts in half an hour.' His journey to school was presumably short; the school's immediate neighbourhood is 46 per cent NS-SEC 1-2 and over 68.5 per cent white-British (UK Data Explorer, 2012). Similarly, at HBS Chelvy described how working-class students like herself tended to commute further, whilst the local white middle-class students lived locally in the neighbourhoods of Hampstead or Golders' Green: '[it was] particularly ethnic people that travelled'. These circuits, these collective individual trajectories composed of bus journeys and daily routines, are still inflected by segregation, even in London's diversifying suburbs. The continuing presence of a group of *local* white middle-class students, albeit now a minority in an increasingly diverse suburban intake, represents the continued racial segregation of certain older suburbs. These neighbourhoods provide a maintained local, though now minority, white middle-class circuit into the grammars. Moreover, ethnic-minority students at KHS described friendship groups divided along lines of ethnicity, partly due to and exacerbated by these very large differences in home-school distances. In many ways, this is a mutation of the old grammar school divide between those 'from detached homes and with standard English voices' (Evans 1991. Cited in: Galvani, 2010) and the working-class students taking 'a bus ride to a leafy Surrey village […] a different world' (Black-Hawkins, 2001: 36). This division is now not only class-based but also racialized. The deliberate political preservation[4] and, in the case of KHS, re-creation of grammar schools in Outer London's changing multi-cultural suburbs underlines the uneven geography of comprehensive school reform over the 1970s. The strong parallels between earlier post-war circuits of grammar schooling and those experienced in the 2010s by working-class and lower middle-class students of colour suggest a failure of progressive educational politics to fully challenge the institutional geography of grammar schools and the cultural geographies of home to school journeys that this creates. Just as the symbolic value of certain 'gentlemanly' cultural practices have been partially preserved within schools that are now hyper-selective, the circuits of education that accompany this geography of schooling have undergone a similar process of transformation and re-creation of past journeys to suburban grammar schools.

Conclusion: The British South-Asian grammar circuit in London and the persistence of elite educational traditions and institutional hierarchies

These London grammar schools, located within both the field of 'super-state' schools of London and the broader set of elite private schools across the South-East, are no longer the implicitly white grammars of the 'leafy suburbs' even if this short-hand still applies to many. The rise of the suburban British South-Asian circuit has transformed certain institutions; and whilst this is not limited to London, these state-financed selective grammars belong to a unique constellation of elite educational institutions clustered in and around London. The school discussed here challenges at the very top of this hierarchy, the apex of the independent sector, creating a state-sponsored circuit of education to elite universities which allows both upward social mobility and social reproduction of suburban British South-Asian families. Within these hyper-selective state grammars, the distinction between state and private is at its most blurred.

The historical approach adopted here has illustrated the persistent symbolic value of certain elite, male educational practices as a school seeks institutional prestige. During both periods discussed, the school has attempted to re-position itself within the dominant sub-field of the hierarchy of London's schools in part by mobilizing 'gentlemanly' forms of cultural capital which have retained their symbolic value despite over a century of change. As I have argued above, the research exploring the 'London effect' and the sociology of education more broadly has tended not to take a historical approach. Banks' (1955) early approach, like other early sociologies of education (Floud and Halsey, 1950; Lacey, 1970), traced the lineages and the persistent prestige of an academic model of secondary schooling over a fifty-year period. Contemporary research in contrast has tended to take the 'epochalist' sociological approach criticised by Savage (2009) and Inglis (2014). Within the analysis of both social mobility and the success of London schools this is acutely important, as without a longer historical perspective the persistence and creation of new forms of inequality between schools becomes invisible. Whilst not all elite state schools in London's field of schooling have adopted the hyper-selective and 'gentlemanly' practices described here, their retention by KHS and other suburban grammar schools have retained this, underlines the deep persistence of elite forms of educational culture. The continuing prestige of rugby union and other elite sports, the

prestige of Oxbridge admissions, the prefect system and, crucially, the return and enhancement of selection – all are signs that the academic mode of secondary education described by Banks (1955) remains culturally powerful. Alongside the London effect are deeper forms of institutional and cultural inequality between state schools; simply focussing on the contemporary processes of social mobility of marginalized groups hides the re-creation and persistence of a deeply unequal educational system.

Changes in intake have been combined with a regressive transformation of the school within the traditional framework of British elite education. At KHS in particular, British-Indian and other ethnic-minority students experience a particular revanchist, conservative form of traditional British education. Neo-liberal educational reform has been used at the school to bolster and re-make the old, deep structures and practices of elitist forms of British schooling. However, something deeper is at work, the broad project at King Henry's is to revert to meeting the 'criteria that count' which are those of the ossified educational culture concentrated in the elite private schools of the South-East. The idea of the 'gentlemanly ethos' of rugby is combined with the rigorous extension of the prefect system, setting and examinations. This new hyper-selective internal organization of the school combines with the partially adapted values of the late nineteenth and early-twentieth century elitist educational culture and hierarchies that have never been effectively challenged in British society (Joyce, 2013: 323). The institution through which there runs the new British South-Asian trajectory of upward mobility, in part, reflecting a strategy of embedding middle-class status, is deeply conservative and regressive both organizationally and culturally. More broadly, the re-asserted 'gentlemanly' culture that has been restored to the school has deep historical roots (Anderson, 2007) which are being 'reworked' in the context of a dramatically changed school intake.

Schools like KHS show the long-term resilience of this conservative educational culture, and also its adaptability. This culture is still deeply entwined with and shaped by the mode of sponsored mobility into elite institutions (Turner, 1960: 864) which still pervades English education (Gamsu, 2015). There has long been a logic of selective inclusion and a limited 'porousness' of elite education to new social formations (Anderson, 1964) with elite universities historically responsive to shifts within the middle class (Jenkins and Jones,

1950). Schools like KHS suggest that the elite universities may receive a significant and perhaps rising number of ethnic-minority students in the future, but when recruitment is from schools like KHS it seems probable that these will be students from suburban middle-class families seeking the cementation of class status through elite universities as opposed to large numbers of working-class students of colour. Nevertheless, these trajectories form broad circuits of upward mobility, as even for those students from a professional middle-class background, access to Oxbridge and other elite universities is still often a new experience within their families. However, this school and many of London's other remaining grammars are far from being motors of social mobility. They represent a school system which has tended to accept or ignore inequalities between a rising cluster of elite 'super-state' schools and the majority of schools with sixth forms and Further Education Colleges. London may be a 'hotspot' for social mobility on certain indices, and the attainment of students from deprived backgrounds is rightly lauded, but the capital's state schools are deeply unequal. These inequalities are exacerbated by the pressures of the housing market and the intense competition for school places. The 'Other' London effect reflects how the city's school system represents the regressive tendencies of elitist educational culture expressed through new forms of inequality and classed and racial divides in the twenty-first century.

Notes

[1] A-levels are the final academic school-leaving exam sat at aged 18 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. GCSEs are common exams sat by all students at age 16.

[2] For more on this alignment of institutional and parental aspirations and how students' university success serves as a form of symbolic capital for schools, see Gamsu (Forthcoming).

[3] Circuits of *education* as opposed to circuits of schooling refer to the patterning by race, gender and class of students' socio-spatial trajectories from particular schools to particular universities.

[4] Selective grammar schools were preserved in certain boroughs of Outer London because of the political geography of the city over the 1960s and 1970s (See: Gamsu, 2016).

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