Special Issue Introduction

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Editorial: Elite schools and the paradoxes of distance and proximity to capital and the state

This special issue problematises the relationship between the state, capital and elite schooling. Whilst it is well-established that elite schools are sites of capital accumulation and conversion for families and students, how institutions manage and negotiate their relationship to economic capital and wider forces of economic accumulation are less well explored. We know little about the material basis (Ball, 2015: 237) and set of interrelations which allow elite educational institutions to accumulate wealth and power. This special issue therefore draws together papers that examine how schools relate to capital and how the state mediates and enables the relationship of elite schools to forms of institutional wealth.

Despite frequently holding charitable and/or not-for-profit status, elite schools maintain close proximity to economic capital through fees, endowments, philanthropy, alumni funding campaigns and trading activities such as leasing out facilities and satellite campus operations. They tend also to be physically proximate to wealth – located in historically wealthier areas (Cookson Jr and Persell, 1985; Courtois, 2018; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009) or in privileged, white enclaves within economically and ethnically mixed territories (Bolay and Rey, 2021).

Elites generally possess an ability to occlude their financial affairs, yielding them substantial power. They discreetly determine and govern financial spaces and institutions via the law and services such as wealth management and tax planning, enabling their self-interested extraction and accumulation of financial capital without attracting challenge or even adverse criticism. More profoundly, it enables elite wealth to avoid the public and sociological gaze.

Elite education has a similar capacity to disarticulate itself from the violent materiality of profit and accumulation. Schools catering for the wealthy are typically discreet about their wealth and that of their clientele. There is a form of institutional magic at work where the crass and brutal realities of the extraction and accumulation of capital, in which both the elites using these schools and the schools themselves are heavily invested, are both distanced and hidden by the public-facing work of reproducing and creating forms of elite culture. Accordingly, this special issue seeks to make visible the ‘indissoluble connections between material production, political and cultural institutions and activity, and consciousness’ (Williams, 1977: 80) that exist within elite schools.

There is a similar paradoxical relationship between these schools and the state where an apparent maintenance of distance obscures a close relationship. For instance, in many countries, the state has been directly involved in the creation of elite schools intended to produce state elites such as senior civil servants, military officers, and colonial

administrators. State funding has often been, and continues to be, an important aspect of the operations of these schools (van Zanten and Maxwell, 2015), yet, as in the UK, it may be hidden from sight via tax reliefs (Boden et al., 2020). Where fees provide all or part of the schools' income, complete or relative autonomy from the state in matters of governance, admission, curriculum and (to varying degrees) examination is the norm and a source of pride and distinction. And, as with other aspects of elite power, these financial arrangements remain obscure and not amenable to public or the sociological gaze, wrapped as they are in arcane complexity.

What appears as a separation from the state is more often a carefully cultivated and maintained enmeshing of elite educational institutions into its sinews. Elite schools have carefully cultivated and lobbied for legislation that protects their financial interests (Boden et al., 2020; Courtois, 2018; Lowe, 2020; Kenway et al., 2024 – this issue) or exempt themselves from major reform (Sandgren, 2017). They have also been at the centre of legislative battles that have enacted and demarcated the states' efforts to enforce both apartheid (Pretorious, 2019) and desegregation (Purdy, 2016) across different countries. Even where elite schools are fully privately funded, the career destinations of their alumni into high offices of state (as lawmakers, civil servants or military officers) act to reinforce this proximity to state power.

This state-elite education relationship is mutually nurturing. Elite schools align themselves with new projects of capital accumulation that are frequently enabled by state intervention at local, regional or national levels. This is true both historically, reaching back to the developing English colonial state and financial interests in the slave trade as Gamsu *et al.* (2024 – this issue) examine, and in contemporary projects of real estate development where associated private schooling facilities are fostered by regional and national governments in China as Liu (2024 – this issue) and others have explored (Zhang, 2023; He, 2022). This special issue seeks to elucidate and examine these often hidden or mystified relations of power that situate elite schools as part of this intertwined nexus of capital and state.

This introduction provides a framework for this analysis and unpicks the paradoxes highlighted above. First it argues that there is not only a transmutation of capital through elite schooling but a more complex *alchemy* between schools and capital. Next, it explores the role of elite schools in the formation and reproduction of capital and class. It then examines the role of money in the provision and display of luxury, and the influence of philanthropy. The final two sections explore how schools are implicated in colonial forms of accumulation and extraction and finally, the paradoxical role of the state in enabling capital accumulation. As we develop these themes, we situate this special issue within the wider literature on elite schooling and explore why the economic and political or legislative material bases for elite schooling have perhaps been overlooked or not drawn together in one place as we seek to do here.

Alchemy with capital

Much of the literature on the sociology of elite education that addresses the transmutation of capital – primarily, its conversion from financial to cultural and social – typically focuses on individuals and families. Schools' own institutional strategies tend to receive far less attention. This transmutation by and within schools as institutions in their own right is a central theme in this special issue.

A slippery relationship between money and culture and social status is central to the operation of elite schooling and is expressed in a multiplicity of ways. Thus, elite schools rely on: carefully cultivated historical or pseudo-historical mystique (Joyce, 2013); refined and selective forms of cultural practices and representation embedded in curriculum (Angod, 2015b); extra-curricular activities in service/volunteering (Angod, 2015a; Kawecka Nenga, 2011); sport (Horne et al., 2011; Mangan, 2000; Wang, 2016); arts (Macquarrie, 2016); and in material dimensions such as facilities, the landscape (Angod and Gaztambide-Fernández, 2019), and; architecture (Walford, 2021). Luxury is a key positional good offered by the schools (James et al., 2022).

Elite schools commodify and trade in their provision of access to these 'refined' forms of culture. The selling of culture through the act of educating reifies and establishes symbolic and physical distance from the capital and wealth necessary to produce this culture. The pricing strategies of the schools often reflect not the cost of provision but rather Veblen pricing – a price that signals the exclusivity and therefore desirability of the service or product offered (James et al, 2022).

The transactions that sustain these relationships are complex. For instance, at Tonbridge School, a boys' boarding school in South-East England, the renegotiation of rent of historically owned property in central London involved offshore trusts owned by Chinese and Dutch investors in the privatisation of a university accommodation block. Higher rent from the property contributed to redeveloping the school's facilities, including exhibition space and the construction of a university-style library (Gamsu, 2016). British elite schools are involved in diverse, complex forms of franchises and partnerships with corporations - including property development firms - to operate their overseas branches, with the profit yielded used to finance activities that legitimate their charity status (Courtois and Donnelly, 2024 – this issue). As Kenway and Lazarus (2018) argue, elite schools create moral discourses of virtue across their various activities (from sport to volunteering) that provide forms of positional advantage for schools and their students. They draw on Marx's theory of commodity fetishism to show how these 'virtues' form valuable commodities for the school which veil and mystify how they both rely on and reinforce forms of structural inequality and violence.

The literature consistently reports on the mystique created by elite schools. One particular form of mystique is grounded in the Anglo-British public school tradition; this reflects the cultural and economic fusion between aristocratic, capitalist and colonial fractions of the British ruling class (Anderson, 2007). This created an architectural style, organisational features, and at times staff, gowns and artefacts which have been exported globally (Courtois, 2013; Sandgren, 2017; Bunnell et al., 2020; Kenway et al., 2017). As we return to below, the

historical and contemporary creation of this mystique is also deeply imbricated in the intersecting processes of elite formation/reproduction, colonialism and whiteness (Ayling, 2021; Williams, 1944; Gaztambide-Fernández and Angod, 2019). Angod (2015a) characterises this as what is hidden 'behind and beyond the ivy' – making it necessary to lift the veil that obscures how elite subjectivities are constituted by and through elite schools. Referring to the reform of Oxford and Cambridge colleges in the late 19th century, Joyce (2013: 300) notes how 'this reinvented college life involved in turn the evocation of ancient tradition and the mystique of ivy-covered walls' creating a powerful and seductive set of myths and rituals which continues to attract students and parents whilst masking the relations of power and economic capital that underpin these institutions.

Elite schools rarely showcase their clients' wealth in their promotional materials or outward-facing communications. Rather, their legitimating discourses often employ the cliché of the hard-working middle-class family sacrificing other luxuries to offer their child the best possible life opportunities. In some schools, relatively Spartan facilities are a source of pride (Courtois, 2018). International students and overseas branches are often hidden from view – partly because schools promote themselves based on their Englishness and therefore whiteness (Brooks and Waters, 2015) and partly because international activities represent a lucrative income stream which the schools are not comfortable displaying as it is not aligned with their avowed ethos (Courtois, 2016).

Schools do not always look luxurious or at least not uniformly so. It is not uncommon to see older buildings in some state of disrepair, or dated, faded décor in some parts of otherwise well-maintained schools: this is consistent with the aristocratic sentiment still favoured by some client families (Cookson Jr and Persell, 1985; Courtois, 2018). Material markers of wealth are present in the form of luxury clothing, watches and other paraphernalia that students at Lillie's (2024 - this issue) Swiss boarding school wear. At the same time, students at the school are taught to do their own laundry as a deliberately taught culture of 'humility'. There is a constant dance here of proximity and distance, proximity to wealth carefully managed to balance a display of power through the provision of luxury whilst maintaining legitimacy by appearing 'normal'. Cookson and Persell (1985) wrote in the 1980s that US elite schools "tamed" nouveau riche families by teaching them to be discreet rather than ostentatious about their wealth. Elite educational culture acts as a form of ritualisation, just as money laundering through Swiss banks requires rituals that protect, hide and obscure sources of wealth (Carlin and Lokanan, 2018), elite schools act to cleanse (Page, 2022) and hide the power, violence and exploitation necessary to create extreme levels of economic capital and transforming it into its cultural form. Capital dissolves into capital.

This tension between maintaining proximity to wealth while masking it is what makes elite schooling an example of commodity fetishism *par excellence*. As Marx (1887: 47-48) notes, a commodity is 'in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties'. He continues:

> […] the products of labour become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses. […] in the act of seeing,

> there is at all events, an actual passage of light from one thing to another, from the external object to the eye. There is a physical relation between physical things. But it is different with commodities. There, the existence of the things qua commodities […] have absolutely no connection with their physical properties and with the material relations arising therefrom. There it is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race.

If elite schools are essential to the conversion and transmutation of economic into social and cultural capital, this is enabled precisely by the attempt to obscure the role of wealth in creating elite culture. What becomes obscured is the violence, exploitation and destruction that is central to so many accumulation strategies in operation now and historically. We do not look at an elite school and see the capital invested in buildings, facilities and school practices as reliant on the uneven and unequal production and distribution of capital, with all the violence that entails. This is totally distant from the elite image and practices that are carefully managed by these schools. Much of the work that is done through and in these schools involves precisely the disconnecting of these schools 'with the material relations arising' from the accumulation of capital. The intangible, mystical, imperceptible aspects of elite culture are precisely an operation of capital, a fetishistic obscuration of the ties that bind elite schooling to the accumulation of wealth and power, whatever the human costs in the past, present and future.

Schools and the formation and reproduction of capital and class

Elite schools have historically served to fuse older and newer class interests as the structure of capitalism changes. The changes in the strategies of accumulation of capital across time and space (Jessop, 1991) tend to be reflected in new formations and patterns of reproduction of the ruling class through education. As economies change, a porosity to new wealth influences the institutional configuration of elite schools. Bourdieu (1996) observed this in his study of French higher education – noting the rise of corporate elites and their administrative and business schools alongside older republican academic elite schools and their public sector/intellectual elites.

In Britain, elite schools played a key role in combining and fusing aristocratic, financial, commercial, industrial and colonial fractions of the upper and middle class over the 19th century (Rubinstein, 1986; Scott, 1991). This responsiveness to the changes in accumulation strategies and the new social formations that this produces is key to the longevity of elite schools. Several examples from the British context of accommodating 'new money' illustrate this well: the inclusion of the 'West India Interest' (the sons of the slave-owning elite of the

British Caribbean across the 18th century) (O'Shaughnessy, 2000: ; Gamsu et al. 2024 – this issue; Williams, 1944), the City of London banking families in the late 19th century (Lisle-Williams, 1984) and the rising Irish Catholic elite in the 19th and early 20th centuries (O'Neill, 2014). These fusions of different social formations corresponded to economic changes within Britain and the British empire and created a distinctive white, masculine and imperialist 'gentlemanly' culture of elite education which retains a lingering influence in elite schools in Britain even as their intakes change (Gamsu, 2018). This form of elite educational culture from late 19th century Britain continues to act as a palimpsest in the elite schools established across the former British empire (Ayling, 2019; Courtois, 2013; Kenway et al., 2017), with synergies with other models such as the continental model of elite Jesuit education in some cases (O'Neill, 2014). It has also been commodified and used as part of the sales strategy in the satellite school phenomenon across Southeast Asia and the Middle East (Wu, 2023; Courtois, 2024). If history is 'a graveyard of aristocracies' (Pareto, 1966: 249) then it is a very haunted graveyard where the cultural legacies and spectres of earlier elites continue to haunt the culture of contemporary elites and their institutions. Schools are a key site where modes of elite culture are retained, recycled and renovated in ways that suit current circumstances as elites are both reproduced and renewed.

These exemplars underline how elite schools have to be porous and adaptable to the rise of new dominant class fractions corresponding to shifts in national and global economies if they are to prosper. Vasilenko's (2006) comparative study of the rise of forms of private schooling in Moscow and Beijing highlights precisely how growing wealth inequality and the rise of new middle classes or extremely wealthy owners or managers of former state enterprises underpinned the establishment of new elite private schools across the two countries. Political legitimacy, as well as economic structural change, also justifies shifting intake in ways that allow the preservation of institutional status and the reconstitution of more 'representative' elites. Khan's (2013) study reflects the dynamics of this in a historic elite school associated with White Anglo-Saxon Protestant Massachusetts elites but now diversifying in both its student body and its curriculum. Faith, the rise of new social formations and elite schooling intersect across a range of global contexts as Rifai (2006) shows in her study of the rise of elite Islamic schools for the urban middle class in Indonesia; and Cheung Judge in her work on 'traditional' Nigerian schools appealing to some diaspora families more than UK or US schools (2021).

Elite schools thus act as sites in which different ethnic and class factions representing different positions of power and relations to both economic and cultural capital can combine. They are sites for the fusion of otherwise competing interests of capital and the attempted cultivation of more cohesive cultures of education that align with certain structures and ways of creating and maintaining new structures of domination - and in a way that remains controlled by and favourable to the traditional male, and frequently white clientele (Gaztambide-Fernandez and Angod, 2019; Karabel, 2006).

Schools, philanthropy and money, money, money

Many elite schools wear their wealth and privilege openly, with visible manifestations of the material resources at their disposal. This often stands in stark contrast to the state education systems that they co-exist with (James et al 2022). Elite schools are typically located in large, impressive and sometimes historic buildings, and surrounded by vast expanses of land offering sports fields, parkland, golf courses, rifle ranges or riding stables as well as long driveways clearly marking their separation from the outside world (Kenway et al. 2017). Those in cities are usually located in the most upmarket areas, similarly insulated from the outside. These physically separated, beautiful surroundings reinforce students' sense of being special and yield institutional cachet. Lillie's paper (2024 - this issue) highlights how the material and symbolic landscape of Switzerland underpins how the school presents and sells itself: natural beauty, alpine sports, financial stability, safety and spatial seclusion are all central to the school's brand. Elite education becomes associated with material forms of beauty and luxury that are antithetical to the extractive and violent production of wealth that maintains these schools.

Beyond these symbolic dimensions, the material resources available to the schools play a direct role in the reproduction of educational advantage that takes place within and beyond their walls. Notably, the schools' resources mean that students have access to the best facilities and equipment (library, computers, software, lab equipment, musical instruments, dedicated practice space, equine facilities, performance space, high-tech sports facilities and equipment) and to high numbers of dedicated staff (not only teachers but also music tutors, sports coaches, lab technicians, career guidance advisors, counsellors, administrative staff, cleaners, etc.) James et al (2022) note that Brighton College in the UK commissioned a world-leading architect, OMA – whose other buildings include the London Design Museum and Moscow's Museum of Contemporary Art – to design its new £55m Sports and Science Centre. Opened in 2020, it features:

> *a cinema-style auditorium linked up to science departments across the globe, 18 university-standard laboratories, six breakout spaces for personal research and tutorials, a 25-metre pool, a strength and conditioning suite, a rooftop running track with panoramic views, and a double-height sports hall. (Extracted from the Brighton College website)*

Importantly, there are variations in the wealth levels of schools and only relatively few schools have unassailable levels of capital in investments and property. Most English private schools for example are reliant on fees for their income though they are still substantially wealthier than local state schools (Gamsu, 2021; Gamsu, 2022).

The relative abundance of resources available to elite schools is made possible by a variety of income streams. As well as fees, there are also donations, bequests, investments, they can be the beneficiaries of other charities, and in some systems the benefit from tax breaks and/or various forms of direct state subsidy (Kenway et al., 2024 – this issue). Increasingly, schools generate income by charging others for the use of their facilities, or set up satellite schools overseas to generate income for 'charitable' use in the home country.

Whilst elite schools stress their social role and societal value, they are underpinned, enabled and ultimately defined by significant wealth – or at the very least financial resources that are

disproportionately large compared with non-elite (usually state) schools. Money makes their world go around, funding lavish facilities and services that in turn justify fees which enable them to be selective on the basis of wealth.

This was not always the case – the early English private schools from which the elite ones have emerged were created as beneficent social institutions for 'poor scholars'. As feudal social structures declined and were replaced by industrial capitalism, the schools were colonised during the 18th and 19th centuries, first by aristocrats and then the emerging metropolitan and colonial bourgeoise. The schools adapted as capitalism evolved. And, throughout this process, the elite school sector in England and colonial offshoots in countries such as Australia sought to influence the legal structures of the state to achieve maximum extraction of financial resources (Boden et al, 2020; Kenway et al, - this issue). Clough explains, from a sociolegal perspective, how the construction of legal regimes enables elite schools, in England at least, to maximise their extraction from the state whilst avoiding the necessity of benefitting wider society in return (Clough, 2024- this issue).

Elite schools are also sites for the direct accumulation and conversion of capital through the involvement of wealthy donors in their foundation and the cultures of philanthropy that maintain them. Elite schools have been used as loci for the very wealthiest members of the ruling class to seek to preserve their names, sanitise their legacies and structure education in ways that suit their interests or vision. Thus, we see the use of ill-begotten capital from the 18th century slave trade to found schools in Britain (Gamsu et al., 2024 - this issue) to the donations from Standard Oil shareowner and philanthropist, Edward Harkness, to Philipps Exeter Academy (Levy, 1990) and several other American private schools. Russian oligarchs have also founded a number of private schools since the early 1990s (RichestRussian, 2017; Vasilenko, 2006: 262). Sandgren (2017: 210-213) notes the financial support of corporate leaders in Japan and the Jordanian monarchy in the recent establishment of Kaiyo Academy and King's Academy, Madaba respectively. Some of our own work has also pointed to the role of philanthropy and the increasingly organised fundraising of elite schools (Gamsu, 2022; Boden et al 2020; Courtois 2015, 2018), however the literature on philanthropy and elite schooling is far less developed than that on universities and their ties to philanthropic elites (e.g. Warren et al 2014).

Thus the transfer of wealth from rich donors to elite schools advantages both and simultaneously cements their relationships. Schools gain significant funding, but from high social status sources that also give them cachet. The donors receive social recognition and prestige for being benevolent. The donations are therefore less pure gifts and more prestations, the mobilisation of capital for mutual advantage.

Whilst these transfers are lauded and celebrated to mutual advantage, in school publicity or the naming of buildings or prizes etc, the ultimate source of the funds is often unclear. In particular the expropriations of capital that make gifts possible – for instance from colonial exploitation – are rendered invisible or even denied. For instance, in the debate about the toppling of the statue of slave owner Edward Colston into Bristol harbour, his champions pointed to his many philanthropic acts for the city, including the founding of a school. It is a

sign of the adaptability of elite schools that in 2022, after much heated debate, Colston School changed its 300-year-old name to eviscerate the name of its founder. Many other British schools and higher education institutions have followed suit – but most have retained the financial privilege from their historic associations.

The coloniality of elite schooling: the dialectic of colonial violence and the formation of elite knowledge

Elite schooling and whiteness co-constitute one another (Gaztambide-Fernandez and Angod 2019) and even the architecture and landscape of elite schools express coloniality (Angod and Gaztambide-Fernandez 2019). It may be that distinct forms of schooling for elites predate colonialism, but it is certainly true that elite schools in their modern iteration are intrinsically connected to histories of colonialism and coloniality. Capitalism relies on racial categories: "Capitalism is racial capitalism" (Melamed 2015). The formation of a new racialised division of labour and the creation of 'race' as a category, was combined with the expropriation and suppression of indigenous forms of knowledge and the mystification of European modes of knowledge production (Quijano, 2007; Quijano, 2000). This for Quijano (2007: 169) made European culture:

> 'seductive: it gave access to power. After all, beyond repression, the main instrument of all power is its seduction. Cultural Europeanisation was transformed into an aspiration. It was a way of participating and later to reach the same material benefits and the same power as the Europeans'.

Alongside and beneath commodity fetishism, was this duality between the seductive mystique of European knowledge and violent colonialism and later coloniality. The creation of elite schools, initially in the metropole and later as part of the co-optation of local elites in the colonies, met the requirements of colonialism for a transformation of knowledge and its segmentation in exclusive institutions. Knowledge both enabled the technology necessary for colonial expansion and simultaneously created cultures and structures of class, race and gender that benefitted and reinforced this structure. The mystique of elite schooling discussed earlier is intrinsically linked to this colonial model of cultural seduction. Achieving this required, and requires, repression and violence. The historical creation of this situation where elite forms of knowledge were solely European required genocide, enslavement, land confiscation, serfdom and indenture on a vast and global scale though mediated and contextualised in distinct geographies (Quijano, 2007: 170).

Ayling's (2024) paper in this issue, highlights precisely how discourses of 'world classness' and educational excellence are in fact embedded in the preservation of this racialised coloniality of knowledge. British whiteness is carefully managed by both British international schools in Nigeria and by parents selecting schools and schools selecting students in ways that carefully manage the '*degree of Britishness*' as a white British headteacher puts it

(Original emphasis. Ayling 2024: 12). Whiteness thus becomes a method of 'soft-selling' for British private schools in the UK and international schools in Nigeria. For these elite schools and their agents, this racialised form of branding mediates between, or is the conduit for, the economic necessity of the school's financial position and cultural forms of white supremacy. This association of whiteness with elite forms of culture and knowledge and its continuing symbolic value is deeply embedded in and maintains the coloniality of power and the coloniality of knowledge more specifically (Grosfoguel, 2007; Quijano, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). Elite schools thus exist as part of the dialectic between colonial violence for capital accumulation and a model of culture and knowledge which is exclusive, racialised and seductive.

Elite schools, and the history of the creation of elite knowledge of which they are part, are interwoven with the history of capitalism as racial capitalism. It is premised on unequal relationships; the exploitation of black bodies, the appropriation of land and resources (Robinson, 2000; Williams, 1944). The 'antinomies of accumulation', the inequalities that racism 'enshrines' and 'that capitalism requires' (Melamed, 2015: 77) pervade education: universities built on stolen land (Stein, 2020); the celebration of donors enriched by the slave trade; investment by institutions in extractive industries (Tannock 2020; Bolay and Rey 2021); the loan system and whom it impoverishes (Mustaffa and Dawson 2021); the exploitation of migrant workers, the promotion of a largely white curriculum over and above local cultures in international education (see Ayling, 2024 – this issue). Elite schools have been particularly active participants in racial capitalism: as landowners; as educators and servants to elites enriched through the slave trade; as recipients of donations; as promoters of whiteness. In addition to Ayling's paper, two further papers in this issue focus on how elite schools are complicit /active participants in racial capitalism. Courtois and Donnelly (2024 – this issue) highlight the extractivist nature of the economic relationship between fee-paying elite schools in Britain and licensed satellite schools operating with their brand in East and Central Asia and the Middle East. This financial relationship means that pay and teaching/learning conditions suffer in the satellite schools whilst the "parent" schools in the colonial metropole continue to invest in luxury facilities. Discourses of whiteness and the supremacy of white British educational culture are also present in these schools and Courtois and Donnelly (2024 – this issue) show how the extractive economic relationship is intertwined with processes that reinforce whiteness, enclosure and dispossession. Taking a more historical perspective, Gamsu, Ashe and Arday (2024 – this issue) examine the financial ties between the foundation of over thirty elite schools in Britain and the transatlantic trade in enslaved people. These schools became a site where the racialised violence associated with the plantation economy was rendered invisible and converted into a form of cultural power for the schools involved. Several of the schools funded with capital from slavery were also the site of state-sponsored forms of mathematical and naval education, which enabled further capital accumulation through colonial exploitation. These elite schools have thus been one site of the 'strong epistemological interventions' that enabled colonization (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013: 23) with the state directly intervening to enable and foster this. We return to links between coloniality, colonialism and the state again below.

Private schools and the paradox of state enablement.

Proximity and close relation to the state remains of central importance to elite schools. This close relationship is beneficial in several ways. The benevolence of states towards elite schools is central to maintaining the legal framework that supports their financial position and allows them to retain their special status, both formally and informally, compared to other schools. The state and various government agencies are also a significant destination of employment for their alumni. There is a "paradox of state enablement" in the contradictory position held by many elite schools as institutions that (re)produce state elites whilst simultaneously deriving their legitimacy from a proclaimed autonomy from the state. Kenway et al. (2017: 231-232) highlight the varying degrees to which different elite schools in their study are exempt from the state's disciplinary mechanisms. Their links to the state, through alumni and parents, ensure that "at worst, the state does not operate against their particular interests and that, at best, it underwrites them" (Ibid.). This strategic relation of proximate distance situates elite schools as both close to and, formally or informally, beyond the usual forms of state control and discipline over majority schools that educate working-class, racially minoritized/global majority and marginalised groups. Elite schools simultaneously maintain forms of special treatment relative to other schools that often puts them outside of the reach of the state when it comes to questions of curricula or inspection. The specific nature of this paradox involves many different legislative and political relations which are context specific.

Understanding the relationship of elite schools to the state requires us to unravel the nexus of relations between schooling, the state and wider forms of capital accumulation. The state is not separate from the accumulation of capital and the particular strategies of accumulation of wealth that are dominant in any particular historical period or geographical location (Holloway and Picciotto, 1991; Jessop, 1991). Over recent decades the state has initiated neoliberal reforms that have seen increasing forms of privatisation of schooling with schooling being used as part of wider neoliberal economic and urban reforms (Lipman, 2013; Kenway et al., 2024 – this issue) as well as the direct site of capital accumulation through private ownership of school buildings and facilities (Cohen, 2023; Whitfield, 2016).

Elite schools have a different relation to both the state and capital accumulation and how these intertwine. Rather than being merely assets in the process of capital accumulation, they have greater, though not always absolute, autonomy to forge beneficial relations to new patterns and forms of capital accumulation. A small number of extremely wealthy schools with large financial endowments are 'the subjects not the objects of capital' (Gamsu, 2022: 1262), able to manipulate and align themselves with new forms of wealth creation at a distance through their investment funds and property holdings. Historic elite schools in the UK, Canada and the USA have established satellite campuses, often through franchise relations with local private educational enterprises, across China, South-East Asia and parts of the Middle East (Bunnell et al., 2020), (re-)creating extractive colonial spatial relations as Courtois and Donnelly (2024 – this issue) discuss here. The economic autonomy that enables these forms of activity relation to capital accumulation are made possible through their relationship with the state both historic and contemporary.

Critical socio-legal history has enabled us to unpick the way that schools have gained financial and tax advantages through systematic lobbying of and protection by ruling class politicians in parliament and through fighting legal cases to ensure advantages are maintained (Boden et al., 2020; James et al., 2022; Lowe, 2020). This longue durée approach to understanding the importance of the state to enabling institutional wealth is examined in several of the papers here. Gamsu et al. (2024 – this

issue) show how the English state, and Charles II quite specifically, intervened to create forms of schooling essential to colonial naval and economic expansion. Bringing a more current analysis, Kenway et al. (2024 – this issue) spotlight the intricate ways that the state enables economic advantage for private schools in Australia through dynamics of extraction, mystification and depletion. Clough (2024 – this issue) explicates how such extractive practices are, in effect, one way with elite schools delivering little by way of public benefit return.

In contemporary China, the relationship of school leaders to senior members of the education ministry was essential to the opening of the international programme alongside the existing nationally oriented, elite key school (Liu, 2024 – this issue). In Liu's paper the development of the school was also aligned to a wider real estate project which has also been the case elsewhere in China (Zhang, 2023). The role of the local (and national) state in enabling both the expansion of private schooling and the development of high-end, gated housing with their own schools aligns both individual familial strategies for capital accumulation and reproduction, and to wider institutional patterns and strategies of capital accumulation for state and corporate actors (He, 2022). Accumulation strategies operate at multiple, overlapping scales: what serves the local entrepreneurial state, real estate developers and private education companies also serves the affluent families able to manipulate and gain advantage in this terrain by buying property to access schools (He, 2022). Elite schools are both the location of individual accumulation and reproduction of social and cultural capital whilst the means of entry to these schools via housing markets simultaneously provide economic accumulation for both wealthy, entrepreneurial parents and the real estate developers. The state here is not situated within capitalist societies or economies but is in fact 'one aspect of the social relations of capital, and therefore stamped throughout, in all its institutions, procedures and ideology, with the contradictions of capital' (Holloway and Picciotto, 1991: 109). Schooling makes particularly clear the way that the social relations of capital, the patterns of economic accumulation, which are bound to the accumulation of other forms of capital (social, cultural and symbolic), are embedded in the state across multiple scales.

Complicating this question is the fact that in many systems elite formation occurs within both privately-funded schools and schools that are entirely or primarily state funded. Several countries exhibit a blurring of boundaries between state and private schools, with selective forms of state school effectively competing, at least on attainment if not in facilities, with privately-funded historic institutions. This is true in Canada (Yoon, 2016), England (Gamsu, 2018), the USA (Petrilli and Scull, 2010), socially and racially-exclusive forms of elite schooling have been able to enhance their status through neoliberal school reform, though elite state schools have a longer history that pre-dates these reforms (Steedman, 1987; Leinster-Mackay, 1981). Even in the French system, which has been characterised by strong state intervention to create and fund elite forms of schooling, the control of the state was never total with Catholic private schooling and early schooling for girls existing partially outside of state control (van Zanten and Maxwell, 2015). The German case is another example of a mixed system although it is closer to the French model of being largely or fully state-funded; selective academic day schools, *Gymnasium*, are overwhelmingly state-funded whilst having a mixture of state, church and private organisation administration (Deppe and Krüger, 2015). These schools sit alongside a small boarding school sector which again varies between fully private and state-funded (Gibson, 2019). Sweden is similar to the German model with free, state-funded, but highly academically selective elite schools in Stockholm strongly associated with urban elites (Larsson and Hultqvist, 2018; Forsberg, 2018) whilst a tiny group of three boarding schools retain a form of fee-paying (Sandgren, 2017).

In systems which have both state and privately-funded elite schools, distinctions in school-type also align to political, religious and cultural differences within national elites as Ziegler (2016) finds in the case of Argentina. In Chile, the fee-paying elite schools are counterposed to the small number of highly selective, state-funded schools, with strong connotations of national/state elites and meritocratic narratives present in the latter. Elite parents opting to pay for the most economically and socially exclusive private schools take performance for granted (Bellei et al., 2020). In the Chinese case, the rise of privately-funded international schools has aligned to growing income inequality and distinctions between nationally and internationally-oriented middle class and elite groups (Soong, 2022; Liu and Apple, 2023; Zhao et al., 2018; Lee and Wright, 2016) with the former using the key school system and the latter using the multiple forms of international schooling that have proliferated since the early 2000s. However, as Liu's (2024 - this issue) paper shows, the provision of international programme schools has been both the result of government policy and requires close relations with the local and national state to open new international programmes. This reflects the distinctions across national and transnational fields of power, with schools' positions aligning to different fractions of the dominant or ruling classes who in turn have different relations to both state and economy (Bourdieu, 1996).

The South African case again combines both elite schools that are private and several state schools that were established as *de facto* elite schools (the Milner Schools for example). The de-limitation of state control and oversight varied, with legal cases establishing the right of private church schools not to pay municipal taxes (Pretorius, 2019: 113). These legal cases also reinforced and stipulated the more precise terms of legislation on apartheid and racial segregation in the South African public school system. Later acts also enforced this for private schools as well leading to conflict between the apartheid state and church private schools which resulted in greater state control and regulation of private schools (Pretorius, 2019: 123). The role of faith organisations in creating and maintaining elite schools and in mediating the relationship to the state is worthy of further consideration.

The particularity of the colonial history of education further complicates our understanding of the paradox of state enablement. Colonialism produced social and economic development in the European metropolis but this same process 'produced and maintained underdevelopment and backwardness in the colony', this underdevelopment required forms of modernisation including in (elite) schooling (Chandra, 1980: 273). The forces that were transforming both colony and metropole were the same forces that created the impetus to reform and establish elite schools both in Britain, France and in the colonies themselves over the latter half of the nineteenth century. What was required was a new relationship between class, race, gender, the body and knowledge in order to create the basis for imperial forms of subordination and domination. In India, schools on the English public school model were organised to "acclimatize princely children to the racial hierarchy of the colonial state" (Sen, 2003: 22). This was a project of transforming the bodies of elite young Indian boys in subordinate parallel to the formation of (primarily) elite white masculinities in Britain (Mangan, 2000). However, schools in the colonies were not creating elites who would totally control the colonial state – this was a key distinction to the relationship between elite schooling and the state in the metropole and the colony (Chandra, 1980: 284). Within the British Empire, it was the white alumni of the schools of the metropole that would play this role. The production of a political elite or ruling class with total mastery of the state was not the intended object of these schools during colonialism, even the sons of the 'indigenous exploiting classes' would have to stand in a position of subordination (Ibid). Elite schools in the global South established during colonialism have shifted from being a central arm for extending and reproducing the power of the colonial state on behalf of metropolitan capitalism to

serving the interests of domestic, as well as continuing international, capitalist interests (Kenway et al., 2017).

Another complicating factor when considering colonial legacies in relation to the state and elite schooling is the role of missionary education in educating elites in post-/colonial countries. The white missionary-run schools for colonial elites in Nigeria and Ghana has left an inter-generational legacy which associates whiteness with prestige and elite forms of educational excellence (Ayling, 2019; Seagrim 2022). These church or missionary society-run schools have had mixed historical trajectories since and sit alongside new forms of both elite private schooling, historic state-funded elite schools like Achimota School in Ghana (Yamada 2018; Lundt 2020) and international schools. In other formerly colonised states, elite schools have a 'promiscuous relationship to the state' (Kenway et al. 2017: 232). Kenway et al. (2017: 126-129) illustrate this with the example of the headteacher of their Singaporean case study school, where state-funding and close relations to government are balanced with interests in maintaining connections and patterns of elite formation that are transnational. In the Indian case study within the same project, Rizvi notes how the older elite schools established by the colonial state have seen increasing competition from schools established through private venture funding associated with the new moneyed classes (Rizvi, 2014: 290-291). This latter example shares some parallels with the establishment of new forms of elite schooling in Moscow during the transition from Communism (Vassilenko, 2006) with new wealth creating new patterns of elite schooling beyond the state.

Conclusion: Elite education as alchemy and paradox

Elite schooling is inextricably linked to the history, geography and sociology of capitalism and colonialism. Schools for those who will operate the gears and levers of domination across economic, cultural, scientific and social spheres have to maintain a close form of proximity to and power over capital and the state as protector of capital. Economic capital is not the only conceptual and empirical tool we need to understand elite schooling, but revealing the relations between elite schooling and wealth provides important affordances. It allows us to unveil the role of elite schools as ruling class institutions that enable and are inseparable from the reproduction and accumulation of capital on a vast, unequal and intrinsically violent scale. The capitalist system we live in was built through colonialism and racial capitalism and the formation of elite schools as 'modern' institutions, (re)formed during the 19th century, is inseparable from the racialised violence, both epistemic and physical, and the extractive, environmentally destructive economics that remain pervasive within global systems of coloniality and capitalism. In this editorial we have drawn on the papers included here to explore the material basis for elite schooling, a disentangling of the relation of elite schooling to capital and the state.

Elite education is alchemy, it acts as a form of solvent, dissolving and mystifying the violence and exploitation involved in the accumulation of capital. Blood turns to gold turns to cultural power, we know this pattern of capital conversion from Bourdieu (1986). In this special issue though, the material basis of symbolic violence, simply the violence of (economic) capital accumulation, is emphasised. The "refined" nature of elite education and culture obscures and transmutes the sources of philanthropic wealth or tuition fees donated or paid to elite schools. The capital accumulation and conversion that occurs in these schools is multi-scalar across both space and time. As strategies and geographies of capital accumulation change, existing schools must either be porous to new elite class fractions or new schools are founded, sometimes directly by the wealthiest members of those classes.

Elite education enables the fusion of older and new ruling class fractions as the power dynamics at the apex of capitalism shift and mutate socially and spatially.

Elite schools, which educate those who embody or are closest to extreme wealth, also display the material signs of that wealth. The flaunting of institutional and individual luxury is overt and yet simultaneously carefully managed to display humility, show generosity and above all retain legitimacy. Once again, the role of wealth is paradoxical as schools plot a careful dance between displaying power through distinction and managing their reputation with critics. Philanthropy is an act of generosity that must be celebrated in order to obscure the sources of that wealth, the institutional celebration of the names of donors is out of joint with the sources of this wealth which dissolves and is transmuted. This paradoxical alchemy is key to the functioning of elite schooling, the act of capital conversion within elite educational spaces is precisely an act of holding disjuncture, contradictory juxtaposition, disharmony and injustice together (Derrida, 2006: 25). The association of elite education with refinement and cultural or scientific excellence is an act of power that is based on paradox, contradiction, mystification and anachronism, disembedding the power of economic capital from its material historical context and transmuting it, first into lead, the neutral form of educational ability, and then once more into gold.

The greatest site and source of this exercise of anachronistic power lies in the link between elite schools and colonialism and coloniality. The seductive power of white, European knowledge was only made possible through colonial violence and elite schools, as the supposed apex of the educational structure, were deeply implicated in this. Elite schools, in both the colonial metropole and former colonies, both rely on and reproduce forms of whiteness whilst increasingly educating global majority students.

Lastly, we discussed the paradox of state enablement where the institutions of the state are frequently led by alumni and yet the full disciplinary power of the state is rarely applied to these schools unlike schools for working-class and marginalised communities. This brief discussion is intended to open further debate and analysis over the complicated and often paradoxical relationship between the state and elite schools. It aims to shift the focus away from discussions of elite cultures and the construction of aspirations or elite worldviews through schooling, to encourage greater scrutiny of the material bases of elite education and its implications, such as the extraction and depletion of resources from underprivileged communities and the legal and political machinations underpinning these. We see this research agenda as essential to a more fundamental questioning of the logics underpinning capitalist exploitation within the field of research on elite education. There is further work to do here to elaborate and unpick these patterns and we agree with Verhoeven et al. (2021) on the importance of further comparative work in this space.

The material basis for elite schooling is far larger in scope than the papers covered in this special issue. Liu's paper highlights the spatial aspects, the urban political economy of elite education and the role of real estate, land ownership, housing markets and other related topics might all be explored further from the specific standpoint of elite schooling. We have talked here about capital as the primary lens, but it would be equally instructive to begin here from the perspective of labour. What are the labour practices of elite schools and not just for teachers but for the less well-paid roles associated with elite schooling from security through to cleaning and catering staff. Here we might draw on other elite studies literature which has begun to explore this area (Delpierre 2022). Faith and specifically the role of organised religion in running elite schooling is another area where further work might be done to understand the organisational control and politics of elite schooling. Further work elaborating on Tannock (2020) and Bolay and Rey (2021) to explore the relationship between elite schooling and extractive environmentally destructive industries would also be timely in the face of the

ongoing climate crisis.

An eye for the material elements underpinning elite schooling should not be seen to detract from the analysis of the *culture/s* of elite schooling but rather to complement it. The sinews that enmesh elite schooling with capital, the state and coloniality are embodied and lived. The distinction between base and superstructure in Marx were always more tenuous and less specified than Marxists went on to suggest (Williams, 1977). Looking at the underbelly of elite schooling, its foundations and intrinsic relations to capital may appear to emphasise the 'base' but in reality the cultural and the economic are fundamentally inseparable.

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