Institutional identities in flux: Internationalisation and elite-making at third level

Much has been written about how the acceleration of global capitalism has led to the rise of a stateless 'transnational capitalist class', or 'global elite', whose commonality of interests transcends national borders and loyalties (Robinson 2004; Sklair 2001; Struna 2013). With high concentrations of wealth and power, its members move freely across the 'global cities', where they have organised their own spaces, and from which they direct financial flows and influence political decisions (Andreotti et al 2014; Tannock 2010). Common career, lifestyle, consumption and mobility patterns allow them to present themselves as cosmopolitan, 'global citizens' impervious to border regulations and rising above narrow national concerns (Birchnell and Caletrio 2014; Ong 1999). There is much debate on the extent of overlap between the global elite and 'traditional' national elites, and on the position and movement of global elites between the local, national and global (Robinson and Harris 2000). Similarly, there is little consensus in the literature on the conditions of production and reproduction of this supposed global elite through education. The rise of the MBA and the growing visibility of international schools suggest that specific educational spaces play a role in these processes. However, it is also argued that the symbolic power of educational credentials is still very much defined within national spaces – and that elite universities in the US and UK, in particular, define what it means to be elite both nationally and internationally.

Arguably, the internationalisation of elite educational spaces and the cross-border mobility of elite students contribute to the formation of global elite identities, networks and practices. Yet not all elite institutions internationalise in the same way. Internationalisation may take the shape of an emphasis on international accreditation, international staff and/or student recruitment, and various ways of presenting as 'global', 'international' or 'cosmopolitan' on paper. It may prompt institutions to relegate national and institutional specificities in order to adhere to the 'world-class university' model (Deem, Mok and Lucas 2008). At organisational level the emphasis might be placed on commercial or reputational benefits; or both might be joined through 'elastic' legitimating discourses (Garneau and Bouchard 2013). Examining these internationalising processes as they play out within elite institutions is one way to grasp how existing patterns of elite distinction and internationalisation relate to each other, interact, amplify or contradict each other.

The two chapters in this section both examine how elite institutions embedded in national spaces respond to internationalisation. Their emphasis on institutional processes and perspectives (from the perspective of organisational theory for Bloch and colleagues, and institutional habitus for Schippling) and the intersection with national government-led imperatives around internationalisation contrasts with the contributions in previous sections of this book, which reflect the specificities of the third-level sector. Second- and third-level institutions operate according to differing sets of principles and modes of legitimation. The main discursive frame dominating secondary schooling is a focus on the promotion of equality of access, even in contexts where the existence of elite institutions and elite tracks is tolerated or supported. While secondary elite schools may be reluctant to be characterised as

such, third-level institutions vie for world-class status and top positions in international rankings, boldly presenting themselves as incubators for the global elite. At the second-level, international education is often more of a niche, a specific space which independent private institutions are better positioned to invest in, compared to less autonomous institutions closely tied to their local or national mission (Weenink 2009). Although the contributions in this book emphasise the growing interest in internationalisation practices across the sectors, nowhere is internationalisation as much an 'imperative' as it is at the third-level (Altbach 2007), where it is arguably a matter of both symbolic and financial survival. International rankings have contributed to the emergence of a global higher education 'market', where universities adopt corporate principles in order to draw large numbers of fee-paying international students. The development of 'world-class universities' has become a focus in many nations, no matter their current position in the global economy. It is often steered by national governments who see 'world-class universities' as supporting a nation's positioning in the global economy: higher education may be framed as an international export; as a site of production of economically useful graduates; as an innovation hub for the knowledge economy; as a magnet for multinationals; as a focus of soft power and national prestige. Policies explicitly aimed at producing status differentiation between higher education institutions have become legitimate, to an extent not imaginable with respect to other levels of education systems.

In several countries, where higher education institutions were originally not strongly differentiated, stratification has been driven from above in order to facilitate the emergence of a few select, internationally visible universities. This is the process Roland Bloch, Reinhard Kreckel, Alexander Mitterle and Manfred Stock examine in their chapter on the German case. To explore the interaction and tensions between internationalisation processes and elite (or elite in the making) institutional identities and practices, Bloch and colleagues focus on two graduate schools funded by the German Excellence Initiative as well as on Master degree programs at three German private universities. The authors explain how 'quantifiable abstractions of internationality' are crafted and measured and how these are used by universities to gain positional advantage both nationally and internationally. Like other neo-managerial modes of evaluation implemented in universities, these specific criteria and measurements collide with traditional ways of conducting and appraising academic work. More specifically, sites of tensions between traditional conceptions of academic excellence and measurable internationality emerge at the level of international student recruitment as well as in relation to the amount of work international students should be expected to do, and their integration to the German student body. The organisational perspective used by Bloch and colleagues sheds new light on processes described elsewhere in terms of neoliberal multiculturalism (Mitchell 2003) or neo-racism (Lee and Cantwell 2012), focusing on the daily negotiations where institutional identities and organisational practices are constantly unsettled and re-crafted, and re-interpreting the demands of internationality and interculturalism through this theoretical lens.

Anne Schippling's chapter focuses on the French situation. As she notes, elite education in France has long been defined within the national space. The *Écoles Normales Supérieures*

(ENS) have a particularly strong connection to the state through their role in the production of academic elites and other top civil servants. Among the French *Grandes Écoles*, business schools were the first to significantly internationalise – in line with their position half-way between the world of industry and the academic world (Bourdieu 1996; Wagner and Serre 2015). Some of these have achieved high positions in international business school rankings. By contrast, while the domination of the ENS in the French higher education landscape remains uncontested, it does not translate into comparable positions in the global higher education space – partly because they are very different from the large, multidisciplinary, research-intensive institutions modelled as 'word-class universities'.

The originality of Shippling's study lies in her choice of two broadly similar institutions, which share common origins as well as the 'ENS' label. Understanding the shape taken by internationalising processes within these institutions, as well as the principles of legitimation at play, helps bring to the fore their differentiated institutional habitus. At ENS Cachan, international research collaborations and engagement with industry are actively sought and play into a representation of the institution as dynamic and open onto the world. By contrast, at ENS Ulm, research is understood as a solitary activity conducted in quiet, closed-off spaces. This differentiation echoes Bourdieu's description of the opposition between cultural capital (ENS Ulm) and economic capital (business schools), with ENS Cachan moving to the latter. From the viewpoint that internationalisation is produced within the specific conditions of marketisation and economic globalisation (Rizvi and Lingard 2010), different patterns thus become discernible, making visible how institutions interpret, embrace or resist these processes, what identities are crafted or re-asserted, and what imaginaries are mobilised. Schippling suggests that ENS Ulm presents as rather unconcerned with the pressure to internationalise, which resonates with Friedman's recent work in an elite British university (forthcoming). In Paradeise and Thoenig's typology (2015), ENS Ulm falls into the 'Venerable' category, that which displays sufficient assuredness to resist, or master change, rather than follow trends. Mergers are currently underway in France as part of a policy effort to allow French universities to achieve international visibility. The ENS will be grouped with other higher education institutions; thus it will be interesting to see whether and how this process will create pressures for ENS Ulm to change their current practices and discourse around internationalisation.

It remains to be seen whether these repositioning processes will significantly alter the configuration of the global higher education landscape. Will these French and German elite institutions rise to the top of international rankings? Can they challenge the domination of the UK and US? Will Brexit and the election of Trump allow challengers to rise to the top, and if so, what region will benefit? Will their graduates become part of the 'global elite'? What form of international education counts: international education per se, or credentials from the institutions which dominate the international field of higher education?

The 'neoliberal imaginary of globalisation' influences institutional decisions as well as individual strategies, creating desires for the acquisition of cosmopolitan capital as a means to reinforce employability in an assumed global labour market (Rivzi 2011:698; Sidhu 2006; Shahjahan and Morgan 2015). The global imaginaries thus produced are inseparable from a

belief in the individual career opportunities offered by the global labour market. This constitutes a vast emotional resource that universities can tap into. It also has a homogenizing effect on institutional discourses, making ever more pressing the need to present themselves as bigger, and better. Yet, as suggested by Brown, Lauder and Ashton (2011), this is largely an illusion, as the number of highly paid positions may in fact be diminishing due to the overproduction of graduates and the losses of labour movements under the acceleration of global capitalism. In times of uncertainty, when 'the degree is not enough' (Tomlinson 2008), acquiring cosmopolitan capital may be perceived as a guarantee against risk and a way to maintain or gain positional advantage. But an imperfect understanding of shifting hierarchies may lead non-elite students to miscalculate the benefits of their investment. Wagner and Garcia's (2015) study of Mexican students choosing an MBA education in France shows that a French MBA has little value on the Mexican labour market dominated by holders of North-American diplomas. This is not only due to the higher status of US credentials but also to the fact that what matters in an MBA is networks rather than the content of the education.

References to the global labour market abound in institutional marketing discourses but these remain relatively silent on its morphology. Some institutions may produce 'global citizens', but not global leaders. The internationalisation efforts of elite institutions traditionally focused on pathways to national positions may therefore not result in a significant re-configuration of the global hierarchy, which positions only a small number of institutions as producers of global elites. Elite institutions in the UK and US may remain the most likely pathways to transnational elite positions. These can 'funnel' their graduates towards high-paying careers through their unique connections with transnational companies and recruitment agencies (Binder, Davis and Bloom 2016). Furthermore, class remains central to recruitment processes (Rivera 2016), which leaves open the question of how international capital, that may be accrued at and through particular institutions, may (or may not in fact) effectively compensate for the lack of economic and social capital.

It is also uncertain whether international students at these top elite institutions can gain full access to local elite networks. Both Schippling's and Bloch and colleagues' chapters point to the separation of international students from local student networks. Their recruitment is instrumental to institutional strategies but does not elevate them to full membership. This resonates with studies of the recruitment of international academic elites by elite institutions. In the UK, a top tier of internationally acclaimed academic 'stars' may negotiate access to the top ranks of virtually any institution in the world (Paye 2016), while at the same time many non-national academics, not considered part of a select group, often remain trapped in temporary, low-paid jobs (Khattab and Fenton 2016). In this sense, the internationalisation of academic staff serves institutional purposes without challenging hierarchies that pre-date these processes. Traditional elites have demonstrated a remarkable ability to maintain their power and boundaries over time. Elites have the capacity to protect their own positional advantage and to keep contenders at a distance. Their ability to maintain the value of cultural or academic capital as they define it within national borders plays a role in this. Beyond positional struggles within European countries, this raises further questions about the race for

‘world-class university’ status in relation to the strategies that elites from the North deploy to maintain their domination over elites from the South.

As noted by Sidhu (2009: 137), despite ‘the formidable expertise underpinning the discursive machinery of global knowledge economies’, the global imaginary is not easily translated into globalising practices and outcomes as universities ‘remain embedded in, and influenced by complex space/time relations.’ Consequently, ‘pronouncements about the 'end of geography' and the deterritorialised university, and claims that the historic advantages of adjacency are over should be approached in caution for now’.

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