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Researching Elites and Power. Theory, Methods, Analyses. Introduction

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Chapter 1

Introduction



François Denord, Mikael Palme, and Bertrand Réau

Idolized or spurned, the “elites” are a prominent talking point in political debates. Their advocates claim they have rare, exceptional qualities; meanwhile, their foes deem them guilty of everything wrong with the world. The social sciences, free of such extreme passions, have connected the study of elites with the study of power. Like all other social groups, the elites may be subject to multiple investigations, drawing on tried and tested methods (archival research, interviews, observations, statistical analysis, etc.). As Shamus Kahn puts it, “Being an elite is not a mere possession or something ‘within’ an actor (skills, talents, and human capital); it is an embodied performative act enabled by both possessions and the inscriptions that accompany experiences within elite institutions (schools, clubs, families, networks, etc.)” (Khan 2011, p. 136). However, the elites are not only characterized by their exclusive social circles: their power is related to institutions and pre-exists them. Access to dominant positions requires a set of dedicated properties and a constant effort to conform to expected standards, values and behaviors.

Whether power is political, economic, familial, military or religious in nature, the social sciences analyze an unequal distribution of resources legitimated by institutions (the Firm, the Church, the State, the School, the Party, etc.) and highlight two key processes: differentiation and hierarchization. On the one hand, we have societies where an increasingly pronounced division of labor results in distinct

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resources, beliefs and lifestyles; on the other, an asymmetry of power derived from a socially legitimated brand of arbitrariness. Societies produce relatively autonomous social spaces, a small number of which affect all individual trajectories.

Sociology of Elites or Sociology of Power?

As an asymmetrical relation that can manifest itself in highly diverse areas of activity, power has elicited a wide variety of theoretical developments. In some cases, it escapes topography entirely. For instance, Michel Foucault considered power simultaneously as a force for the repression of “irregular modes of behavior” and the production of knowledge (Foucault 1990, p. 9). The philosopher suggested shifting our gaze from the protagonists to the diffuse power relations whereby bodies and minds are disciplined. Power, such as it operates (with its clinics, asylums, prisons, etc.), mobilizes techniques and knowledge, those of the government of the self and others (Foucault 1977). Thus, the analysis of power is the analysis of “governmentality”. Power is not, strictly speaking, a matter of politics or economics; it is everywhere and nowhere at the same time.

Conversely, other theories anchor power at specific points in social space and describe its unequal distribution between agents. Among them, Marxism has most directly connected the exercise of power to the economic sphere. In the age of capitalism, the ruling class, which possesses not only land, but also the means of material production, holds a dominant position in the ideological and political order. The thesis defended in *The German Ideology* (Marx and Engels 1986) has been extensively elaborated upon by scholars who have mainly addressed the role of the State and of the institutions that depend on it, as well as the internationalization of contemporary capitalism (Petrucciani 2016). These authors have sometimes made a distinction between social classes and forces, identifying an internal cleavage within the dominant class, “between two poles, power-capital on the market, and power-knowledge in the organization” (Bidet 2016, p. 41). Reconciled with Foucault and power-knowledge, Marxist theory has paradoxically reconnected with managerialism (Berle and Means 1932), which holds that since the advent of corporations, the owners and managers of firms tend to form two distinct groups, and that the managers, owing to their skills, will eventually supplant the inheritors. This idea had been suggested by former Trotskyist James Burnham in his internationally successful *The Managerial Revolution*.¹ The book argued that the twentieth century would witness the emergence of a new ruling class, formed by managers, who now controlled the means of production in developed nations and would before long go on to seize political power. This argument has for a long time been challenged by other authors inspired by Marx, noting that owners and managers share social origins and

¹ On the reception of his work in France, see Joseph Romano, “James Burnham en France: l’import-export de la “révolution managériale” après 1945”, *Revue française de science politique*, n°2, 2003, p. 257–275.

lifestyles. The capitalist system effectively tends to harmonize their interests: according to Ralph Miliband, “like the vulgar owner-entrepreneur of the bad old days, the modern manager, however bright and shiny, must also submit to the imperative demands inherent in the system of which he is both master and servant; and the first and most important such demand is that he should make the ‘highest possible’ profits” (Miliband 1969, p. 33).

The so-called “elite theories” of power were developed in reaction against the Marxist analysis – especially those of the Italian neo-Machiavellians (Gaetano Mosca and Vilfredo Pareto in particular).² These scholars naturalized power. Pareto wrote, “Every people is governed by an *élite*” (Pareto 1935, p. 169 [§246]). “In all societies, Mosca concurs, [...] two classes of people appear – a class that rules and a class that is ruled. The first class, always the less numerous, performs all political functions, monopolizes power and enjoys the advantages that power brings, whereas the second, the more numerous class, is directed and controlled by the first, in a manner that is now more or less legal, now more or less arbitrary and violent.”³ Pareto admittedly envisions that each domain of social life may produce distinct elites, but effectively favours a distinction between the ruling elite and the ruled mass (although he acknowledges the existence of a “non-ruling” elite). In *The Mind and Society*, he wrote:

Let us assume that in every branch of human activity each individual is given an index which stands as a sign of his capacity, very much the way grades are given in the various subjects in examinations in school. The highest type of lawyer, for instance, will be given 10. The man who does not get a client will be given 1- reserving 0 for the man who is an out-and-out idiot. To the man who has made his millions – honestly or dishonestly as the case may be – we will give 10. To the man who has earned his thousands we will give 6; to such as just manage to keep out of the poor-house 1, keeping 0 for those who get in [...] And so on for all the branches of human activity [...] So let us make a class of the people who have the highest indices in their branch of activity, and to that class give the name elite.⁴

This seemingly empirical proposition raises more problems than it solves, as the number of scales and grades remains up to the researcher.

The theoreticians of the ruling class have embraced one of the main theses of the “rhetoric of reaction”, namely the “futility thesis” (Hirschman 1991), which holds that democracy cannot prevent a minority from hoarding the main positions of power. Pareto directly linked wealth and membership in the ruling class. Mosca added military valor (at least historically), birth and personal merit (Genieys 2011, p. 91). The former openly rejected democracy, whereas the latter admitted that the representative system allows “many different social forces to participate in the political system, and therefore to balance and limit the influence of other social forces and the influence of bureaucracy in particular”.⁵

²For synthetic works on these theories, see Bottomore (1993) and Coenen-Hunter (2004)

³Cited from Bottomore, *Elites and Society*, p. 3.

⁴Pareto, 1935, p. 1422–1434, §2027–§2031

⁵Cited from Bottomore, *Elites and Society*, p. 4.

While Mosca and Pareto did not support the same theory of elites, many debates on the sociology of elites, including critical ones, have built on their work. Mosca stressed that the specificity of the ruling class, compared to the mass, is that it is able to organize. When his research was imported to the US, it fueled debates on the “ruling class” and the 3Cs model – a “conscious”, “coherent” and “conspiracy” class (Birnbaum 1971, p. 133). Although he criticized “parliamentary democracy and the socialist utopia” (Aron 1960, p. 265), Pareto found an extension of his work in Raymond Aron, who turned Pareto’s tripartition into a distinction between “elite”, “political class” and “ruling class”.

These founding debates of the sociology of “elites” had an impact on its subsequent development. This sociology has sometimes reified the existence of a minority purported to be more gifted than the majority of the population: the empirical observation of the existence of hierarchies has in some cases become a normative prescription (the elite is necessary). It has legitimated a form of domination that presents itself as natural, drawing on the gifts, merits or material success of an individual. By challenging the Marxist analysis of power, theoreticians of elites have given politics a leading role or taken refuge behind the argument of pluralism. In liberal democracies, they claim that the competition between the individuals and organizations representing a variety of interests leads to a form of balance and accordingly serves as a protection against the capture of the state by interested minorities, beginning with the representatives of economic power (Dahl 1961). In other words, the pluralists, who C. Wright Mills sarcastically called the “balancing boys” (Geary 2009, p. 158), pretend as if all powers were equal.

The Marxist analytical model has also been contested in terms other than the reversal of base and superstructure. Norbert Elias, for instance, faulted Marx for connecting power and control over the means of production, and making the economic realm the locus of power *par excellence*. He criticizes his view of “the ‘economic’ sphere as an autonomous self-contained functional nexus with laws of its own, but within the functional nexus of the whole society” (Elias 1978, p. 140). Instead, he argues that the sources of power are “polymorphous”: “In so far as we are more dependent on others than they are on us, more directed by others than they are by us, they have power over us, whether we have become dependent on them by their use of naked force or by our need to be loved, our need for money, healing, status, a career, or simply for excitement” (p. 93). In Elias’s work, interdependences remain preponderant, but they are not hierarchized. At odds with Marx, some approaches to power have focused on the observation of face-to-face interactions between the rulers and the ruled to evidence the resources on both sides. They have the merit of giving serious attention to the question of the relationships between the powerless and the powerful. What do the weak do? Generally, they toe the line, even when they disapprove of their lot, as “the more menacing the power, the thicker the mask”, wrote James C. Scott (1990, p.3). When the opportunity arises, they seek to improve their lot, to find a field in which they excel. On the other side, what do the powerful do? They accept to play the game or not (Sherman 2007). Yet, despite what these dramaturgical metaphors may suggest, power relations are not simple

relations of communication where maintaining face in the interaction is the only thing at stake. The asymmetries of the social world are not easily reversed.

How are we, then, to explain, that the vast majority of us agree to participate in a social game where injustice is the rule? Most classical sociologists point to the importance of socialization: we play the game because its rules seem natural to us. Emile Durkheim calls this social phenomenon “regulation”: “Each person is then at least, generally speaking, in harmony with his condition, and desires only what he may legitimately hope for as the normal reward of his activity” (Durkheim 2005, p. 211).

Domination and Institutions

Among the many typologies of power (Lukes 2005), the one C. Wright Mills proposed has simplicity going for it. Power can be “coercion” when violence is used, “manipulation” when ruse and secrecy are employed and “authority” when it is “justified by the beliefs of the voluntary obedient” (Mills 2000a, p. 41).⁶ Many power relations fall under this third category: they are relations of domination. Following Max Weber, we can define domination as the capacity of an order to find itself obeyed without recourse to physical violence: the fact that “the manifested will (*command*) of the *ruler* or rulers is meant to influence the conduct of one or more others (*the ruled*) and actually does influence it in such a way that their conduct to a socially relevant degree occurs as if the ruled had made the content of the command the maxim of their conduct for its very own sake (...) obedience” (Weber 1968, p. 946). Domination requires swift and automatic obedience “by virtue of an acquired disposition”, “a minimum of voluntary compliance, that is an interest (based on ulterior motives or genuine acceptance) in compliance” (Weber 1968, p. 211). Domination, then, only works provided there is a form of complicity between the rulers and the ruled, which may be obtained by coercion or threat. On the one hand, there has to be a *libido dominandi*, whose fulfilment requires the resigned acceptance of its object. On the other, the desire of the ruled must align with that of the rulers; a complex foundation of beliefs is needed for such social magic to work properly.

Weber’s approach has primarily descriptive aims. It tells us nothing about the deeper reasons of obedience, apart from a belief in the legitimacy of the command. Why do we obey? Paradoxically, Weber himself answered this question in relation to bureaucrats, without broadening the scope of his answer to the population at large. The administrative staff does not only obey out of a belief in the legitimacy of the ruler: “it is bound equally by two other factors that appeal to personal interest: material reward and social prestige” (Weber 2004, p. 36). Domination draws on

⁶A fairly similar classification to Mills is found in the work of Bertrand Russell, see *Power. A New Social Analysis* (1948), p. 35-36

what matters to individuals: sad affects (finding means of subsistence) and cheerful ones (securing recognition, affection) (Lordon 2010).

The ways in which domination exerts itself vary widely according to the number of individuals subjected to it. On a broader level, domination operates at a distance, through institutions (the state, schools, corporations, etc.), making it more impersonal but no less efficient. Such an institutionalization of domination diminishes accountability: domination is diffracted at all institutional levels (Lordon 2010, p. 40); having no identifiable origin, it becomes elusive.

Domination thus relies not only on institutions but on the categories we use to conceive institutions. It consists in successfully claiming to impose ways of acting and perceiving. Therefore, it requires the material and symbolic power of institutions. They “institute” social reality, give meaning to ordinary lives and teach individuals to make a virtue out of necessity. Institutions format the “trials” the common man has to face, i.e., the moments when the ratio between one’s hopes and chances is evaluated (Boltanski 2009). Domination and institutions are thus closely connected. Hierarchical forms are crystallized in institutions that should be seen in a Durkheimian manner, as material constructs and perception schemes. They are supporting pillars of the social order. “The only societies without institutions”, wrote Paul Fauconnet and Marcel Mauss, are “social aggregations which are either highly unstable and ephemeral, for instance, crowds, or else those which are in the process of formation” (Mauss 2005, p. 11). Institutions contribute to the perpetuation of the social order. They are primarily material apparatuses, but they also delineate what is possible and thinkable in their respective areas (Boltanski 2009). History keeps producing new, “living” institutions.

Social Fields or Institutional Orders?

Many of the contributions to this book conceptualize the modern social order as regulated by what Pierre Bourdieu sees as historically evolving social fields where particular, and in part very different, material and symbolic values are at stake. These values are protected by the *illusio* of the entrants, the taken-for-granted beliefs pertaining to the *doxa*, the unspoken principles, *nomos*, separating fields from each other, the stakes, *enjeux*, of the game, and, above all, the demands of the investments in field-specific assets (Bourdieu 2000). The distribution of this field-specific capital creates relations of dominance between those who take part, institutions as well as those who Bourdieu prefers to name agents, the individual bearers of symbolic capital and field-adapted habitus. The State, through monopolizing the education system and the symbolic assets it confers, and through playing a key role in the struggles in the “field of power” which define the exchange rate of field-specific species of capital, occupies a crucial role in maintaining order (Bourdieu 1996, 2018; contribution to this book). Dominant agents from differentiated areas of activity (economy, politics, military, religion, etc.) struggle over the commanding principle of legitimation. The outcome of this struggle is the definition of the

hierarchy between those areas and their specific resources. The concept of “field of power” offers a way out of the stale debate between pluralism and monism. It implies a hierarchy of those in power, reflecting the contested valuation of the means at their disposal.

Bourdieu’s analysis bears some similarities to that of Hans Gerth’s and C. Wright Mills’ view of “institutional orders”, meaning sets of institutions that pursue similar ends within a social structure (Gerth and Mills 1953). In *Character and Social Structure*, a social psychology treatise written in the 1940s, the authors proposed a model to study the links between character structure and social structure, combining two main pairs of authors: on the character structure side, Georges Mead and Sigmund Freud; and, on the social structure side, Karl Marx and Max Weber. The concept of role serves as the linkage between the two sides. On the one hand, social actors internalize ways of acting and thinking depending on the social roles they play; on the other, each institutional order forces them to play social roles whose distribution is performed and maintained by an authority. According to Gerth and Mills, there are five main institutional orders in developed societies: the economic, political, military, religious and kinship orders. Each of these lays claim to a monopoly, over the allocation of capital and labor, the devolution of power, legitimate physical violence, the management of salvation goods, sexuality and the family model. In the case of most European countries, it is tempting to add a sixth institutional order to the list: that of the State, which claims a monopoly over the common interest. The state order is actually a perfect illustration of the relation between institution and domination (Lenoir 2012). Its specificity does not lie in its bureaucratic or simply administrative organization, but in the domination it exerts, supported, when needed, by a monopoly over physical violence, and considered legitimate by those on which this domination is exercised (Weber 2004). However, the State also has a cognitive function, being, as Emile Durkheim wrote, “a group of *sui generis* officials, within which representations and volitions are worked out which commit the collectivity, even though they are not the product of the collectivity” (cited from Turner 1993, p. 99). Pierre Bourdieu reconciled these two dimensions by arguing that the State holds a monopoly over legitimate physical and symbolic violence.

As institutional orders are delineated and combined and their relations examined, the social structure, the “skeleton” of a society comes to light. Depending on the era, some orders may not exist, others dominate, and all may operate under diverging principles, intermingle, compete with each other, etc.

While these institutional orders have their own rationalities, they frequently compete because they rarely always stick to their own jurisdictions. An institution is in crisis when it cannot resist an institution from a different order that lays claim to telling the truth on its action perimeter – when the economic order supersedes the political and military orders, when the religious order takes over the State and kinship order, when the kinship order overthrows the economic and political orders – the confusion of roles delegitimizes institutions that must be credible to exercise their domination. Historically, their authority has primarily relied on physical means, on violence. The monopolistic appropriation of material and spiritual goods

has never occurred peacefully. In the political realm, Norbert Elias has shown the considerable extent to which state centralization was owed to the war between feudal lords, gradually leading to the state acquiring a monopoly over physical and fiscal violence (Elias 1994). In Bourdieu, social fields and the institutions proper to them, fulfil similar functions. Having gained a relative autonomy in relation to other social fields, as well as to the State and to the larger social space as a whole, they monopolise the mechanisms of recognition that are the foundation of their internal hierarchies, and defend their borders from intrusion from competing fields.

The mechanism evidenced by Elias in the state order is arguably found in other institutional orders. The power of institutions gradually shifts from coercion to self-restraint. Individuals internalize the rankings, ways of acting and thinking promoted by institutional orders. The authority of institutions rests on beliefs and interests. This means the forms of legitimacy defined by Weber in his conception of the political order are also liable to apply to other areas of practice. What can we say, for instance, about an economic order, depending on whether its principles of legitimacy are connected to charisma, tradition or reason? In the first case, the economy's essential function is to reveal the ruler's power. His consumption will be ostentatious, so as to assert his rank and reassure as to his identity (Veblen 2007). In the case of an economy where tradition prevails, the finality of economic activity will essentially be the subsistence of producers and consumers and the perpetuation of ways of doing things. The same type of reasoning can be applied to the military, kinship, religious and political orders.

As for the relations between these orders, one of *Character and Social Structure's* most valuable original contributions is to show that a society can be characterized through its arrangement of institutional orders. The social structure can thus be defined as the "modes of integration by which various milieus are linked together to form a larger context and the dynamics of social life" (Gerth and Mills 1953, p. 354). Three main principles of integration, which can also be understood as driving forces of historical change, are evidenced.

The first, correspondence, reflects the idea of a social structure where several institutional orders operate autonomously, but according to the same principle. This is best exemplified by the United States in the nineteenth century, characterized by the coexistence of federated states, public and private militias, small businesses, cults and churches, etc. "The principle of integration – which is also the basic legitimation of this society –", Mills wrote in *The Sociological Imagination*, "is the ascendancy within each order of institutions of the free initiative of independent men in competition with one another. It is in this fact of correspondence that we may understand the way in which a classical liberal society is united" (Mills 2000b, p. 45). The second principle, coincidence, refers to a situation where the different underlying principles of the different institutional orders combine, in some cases resulting in a new social structure. The most famous example of this was given by Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic* (Weber 2001). The rationalization of the protestant ethic encountered the ascetic bourgeois moral, thus favoring the emergence of a rational capitalism. The third and last principle, co-ordination, was one of the most widespread in the twentieth century, which saw totalitarian regimes flourish and

power concentrate. It involves the submission of most institutional orders to one or several others. The Nazi regime was its most accomplished form, but the post-war United States also tended to perform such an integration, which is more frequent in highly differentiated societies (Mills 2000b).

Book Outline

This book focuses on how theory and method necessarily combine in the study of elites and power. While some contributions centre on theoretical issues without forgetting their methodological implications, others give emphasis to how elites and power as theoretically constructed research objects can be approached methodologically. A number of contributions are case studies. With a view to accentuate the importance of seeing research in this area as part of evolving traditions, three interviews are included with prominent scholars who have inspired current research. The contributions are divided into four sections.

Power Structure Power is relational by nature: it implies an asymmetric relation between people who are not equal. This asymmetry has less individual than institutional grounds. Rather than depending on individual actors' strategies and their actual decisions, power is a capacity that, first and foremost, depends on positions individuals or groups occupy. This concerns making decisions or not, but also setting the agenda and framing collective interests (Lukes 2005). Studying "elites" requires, therefore, analyzing the power structure in which powerful people operate.

William G. Domhoff's contribution comprises a discussion of the history of power-structure analysis in the American context and the exposition of his "class-domination theory of power" (2013), mainly operationalized through affiliation networks. He actualizes C. Wright Mills' study of the US "power elite" (Mills 1956) whose few members share similar dispositions as well as antagonisms that depend on the relations between the respective domains of activity they coordinate.

Pierre Bourdieu's original contribution revisits the sociology of prominent individuals and develops a field analysis of power (Bourdieu 1996). Prominent figures of critical organizations from different domains of activity compete in a structured space of positions in which diverse forms of legitimacy confront one another. The concept of "field of power" overcomes the worn-out debate between pluralism and monism. It implies a hierarchy of those in power, which reflects the contested valuation of the means at their disposal.

The empirical contributions share the structural perspective of these two theoretical stances, but they contrast sources and methods in different cultural environments. Johs Hjellbrekke and Olav Korsnes retreat pre-existing national surveys to investigate the diversity among the Norwegians who occupy positions of power (from bishops to businesspeople, through academics, judges, civil servants and elected politicians). Jacob Aagaard Lunding, Christopher Houman Ellersgaard and Anton Grau Larsen propose a toolbox for identifying publicly available sources of

information, extracting the relevant data and mapping individuals and organizations in order to visualize power structures. Christophe Charle suggests a comprehensive interpretation of relations between the elite corps serving the French State during the last two centuries. He emphasizes the overarching continuities and recurring phenomena in the ways various regimes (France, Germany, United Kingdom) have exercised State power.

Economic Power Not all powers are equal. The book's second section addresses an order, to speak with Mills, that is dominant in our contemporary societies; the economic. Economic power refers to three types of asymmetrical relations: the ascendancy of economic institutions (in the Durkheimian sense of "all the beliefs and all the modes of conduct instituted by the collectivity"; Durkheim, 1964 [1894], p. 13); the ability of dominant agents to tilt exchange mechanisms and/or modes of production in their favors; the contested control over how firms function.

Even though the ascendancy of the economy characterizes capitalist societies, this predominance varies across time and space, as explained by Michael Hartmann. In an interview, Hartmann discusses how his research on professional and corporate elites has developed. He has, among other things, contrasted the specificities of corporate executives in various countries. To assess its variety, social scientists study the overlap of political and economic domains, their boundaries and arrangements being always contested (Hall and Soskice 2001). The object of inquiry can be a set of crucial organizations, the rules that frame their relations, or the system of relations through which are transferred resources from one domain of activities to another.

Frédéric Lebaron and Aykiz Dogan's contribution addresses a crucial domain of economic power. In differentiated societies, power as domination is institutionalized through sets of organizations. Some of them occupy key roles in the sense that they bridge different domains of activity. Studying the dynamics of those organizations implies documenting the power plays between these domains and their specific logics. When studying rules that affect the production of goods, the provision of services or the redistribution of wealth, social scientists usually investigate the power of lobbyists and the manufacturing of consensus (Laurens 2018); they test the pro-capitalist bias of the legislation (Gilens and Page 2014) and the effects of institutional settings that are more or less favourable to the promotion of the interests of corporations and the agents who control them (Stepan and Linz 2011). One such institutional setting that is decisive for the monetary regime is the central banks that have become independent from elected officials. Lebaron and Dogan combine geometric data analysis and linear regression in order to sketch the system of relations among central bankers and to assess to what extent their social and professional trajectories tend to determine the monetary policies and the decisions they make.

Saidatou Dicko's contribution connects to the interlocking directorates approach as a preferred sociological method for investigating relations between firms (Mizruchi 1996). Mixing this literature with accounting analysis, Dicko investigates the impact of political connections on the government contract success rates of

publicly listed companies in Canada (2010–2014). Her study illustrates how public information, basic financial accounting and Two-Stages Least Squares (2SLS) estimation can be used to analyse the power plays between public authorities and large corporations. The results show that political connections are frequent among publicly listed Canadian companies. These connections are positively, significantly and weakly associated with the winning of government contracts.

Economic power is not reducible to the prosopography of corporate executives. For instance, consultants' prescriptions and persuasion, Sylvain Thine argues in his contribution, rely on their pedigree. Consultants' inherited social characteristics, especially their proximity to the business community, and their academic achievements play a crucial role. Nowadays, consultants incarnate the deserving inheritors, who combine economic and cultural credentials.

This section ends with a contribution exemplifying how historical sociology can be used for exploring economic power. Bruno Monteiro and Virgílio Borges Pereira demonstrate how historical primary and secondary sources can be used when analyzing economic power relations. They excavate archival materials and press-coverage from the 1960s in order to reconstruct the biographies of prominent Portuguese industrialists and their strategies of (social) reproduction.

Elite Formation The third section of the book addresses yet another domain where elites and power are produced and reproduced. In societies where inheritance is not considered as the most legitimate mode of reproduction, access to dominant positions is made possible by selective and exclusive training systems. The analysis of their transformations in several countries, taking into consideration the question of what methodology should be used to grasp the globalization of educational institutions, sheds light on strategies of adaptation and perpetuation of social reproduction. Seemingly incomparable national education systems bear similarities in terms of the function they fulfil, while being endowed with an autonomy that allows them to produce specific hierarchies.

A comparative international perspective is particularly heuristic in this area of research, for it helps deconstruct what may seem implicit or obvious within national contexts. Ciaran O'Neill introduces a transnational historical approach to elite education. Written from the perspective of a historian of nineteenth century elite education, the chapter probes the various methodologies that historians of elite groups and elite culture can approach in their work.

Two contrasted cases are next presented. Firstly, Mikael Börjesson, Donald Broady and Mikael Palme make use of the rich statistical data available to construct elite education as research object in Sweden, while discussing epistemological and methodological obstacles: strong national egalitarian beliefs that potentially influence this construction; the dangers of relying on categorizations created for administrative purposes; and one-dimensional classifications of students' origin and assets. Next, Aline Courtois explains how elite schools may be identified in a context where a postcolonial narrative and the paucity of statistical data have traditionally made conversations on elite education difficult. The chapter reports on a study conducted in Ireland (Courtois 2018). In contrast to the Swedish case, data on the

socio-economic profile of students are not publicly available. In addition, due to local specificities, the criteria established by researchers in the UK and US contexts to separate out elite schools from other private institutions are not directly applicable.

Based on multiple studies of French elite schools, the chapter of Anne-Catherine Wagner focuses specifically on international capital in its institutionalized form (e.g. international schools and diplomas, in particular MBAs) and on the difficulties in establishing its position in the symbolic hierarchy in the national space. It outlines how the instances of legitimation of elite education are becoming internationalized and argues that international capital amplifies the chances of accessing elite positions for those already privileged, but has little value on its own. The chapter calls for more fine-grained analyses of the conditions that allow the international capital awarded by such institutions to be mobilized.

Symbolic Power There is no economic wealth dissociated from symbolic assets. The accumulation of material resources in the form of stocks, land or estate, which is the privilege of economically forceful fractions of the elites and the bourgeoisie, cannot be separated from entitlement, i.e. the social recognition needed for inheriting, acquiring and reproducing property. Studies of the wealthy elite often address its power to secure the existence of a well-protected social space in which social networks, information and the transmission of privilege are restrained to its well-selected members.

Among cultural fractions of the dominating class, such as university professors, art producers, intellectuals and journalists, elite positions require the acquisition of specific forms of recognition awarded by the particular fields in which they uphold their positions. For a painter to be recognized as a leading artist, the appreciation of the artistic field, its institutions, awards and critics, is primal. While strong economic assets may facilitate, they do not entitle the occupation of dominant positions, their visibility even being potentially harmful. Whereas studies of the academic, cultural and media elites do not neglect their links to the economically powerful or the importance of economic capital in shaping their positions, they typically give special attention to the significance of their contributions in the field in which they are active.

While global economic flows and social networks are not new to the bourgeoisie, globalization increasingly affects how symbolic assets in all areas of social activity are defined, and, as a consequence, how elites in those areas are shaped. Internationally or transnationally valid assets in the form of knowledge, skills and contacts challenge those embedded foremost in national contexts and histories. The emergence of transnational or global elites in various social fields, less dependent than before on national languages, culture and institutions and oriented towards an international labor market, is one of debate in current elite research.

Two contributions focus on the study of the dominating class. In an interview, Monique Pinçon-Charlot and Michel Pinçon reflect on their decades-long and now classical work on the French *grande bourgeoisie*. Exploring how the super-rich have appropriated the St. Tropez peninsula, transforming it into a restricted, privileged area for the upper-class, Isabelle Bruno and Grégory Salle illuminate the

conditions for ethnographic studies of the wealthy elite, in particular the advantages and dangers of being a native insider. Focusing on a different part of social space, Martin Gustavsson and Andreas Melldahl investigate how the elites in the field of art producers, the most respected and acknowledged Swedish painters, can be analyzed solely using indicators emanating from the field itself, such as exhibitions, awards, grants, paintings purchased by art museums and mention in articles by renown art critics. Further, Felix Bühlmann and Sylvain Laurens approach theoretical and methodological dimensions of the study of social recognition and symbolic capital in elite research. Bühlmann discusses possibilities and limitations in the conceptualization and empirical application of the idea of international, transnational or global symbolic capital, whereas Laurens critically examines the frequent use of *indicators* of capital possession in elite studies, arguing that it needs to be accompanied and supported by ethnographic research that clarifies why and how the chosen indicators are effective.

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