

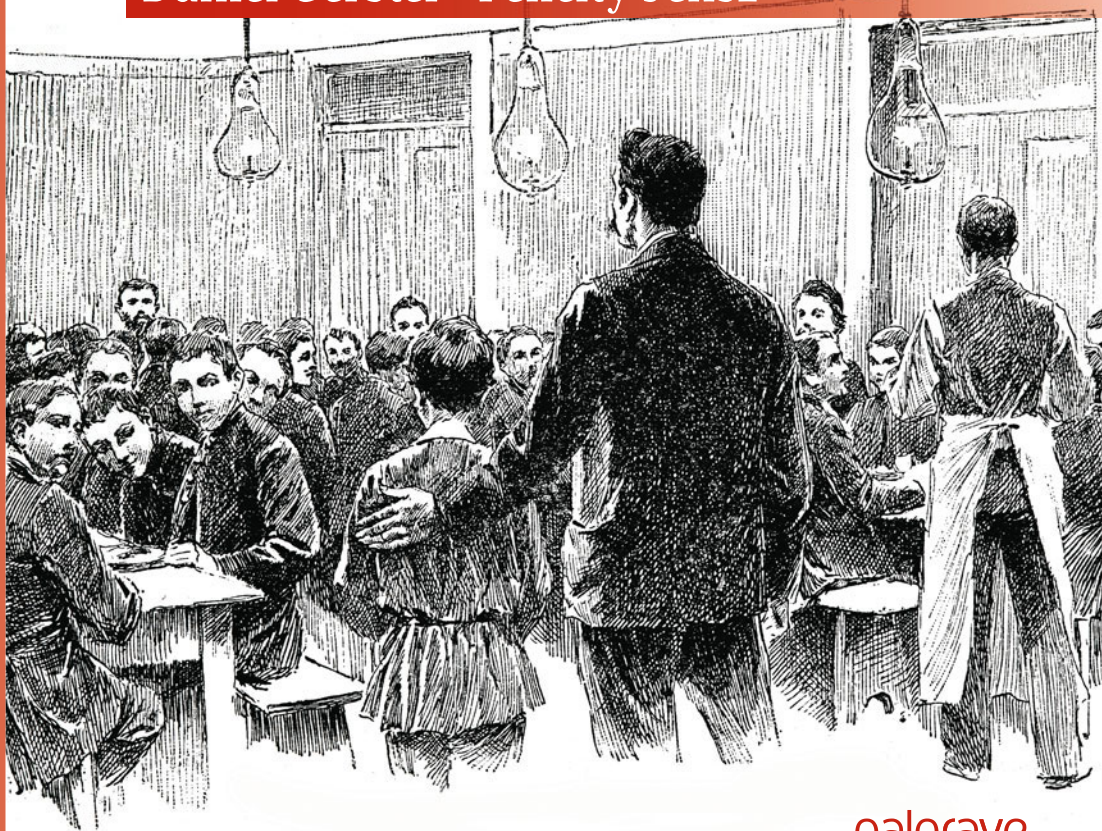


PALGRAVE STUDIES IN THE HISTORY
OF CHILDHOOD

Global Perspectives on Boarding Schools in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

Edited by

Daniel Gerster · Felicity Jensz



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Hamburg
Münster

Daniel Gerster
Felicity Jensz

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Global Perspectives on Boarding Schools in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

Daniel Gerster and Felicity Jensz

In early 1879, the young Edmund F.E. Wigram started attending the prestigious Harrow School, a fee-paying boarding school for boys in the South of England. Edmund was the oldest child of Reverend Frederic E. Wigram, who had himself attended Harrow between 1848 and 1853.¹ Edmund Wigram boarded at Harrow until the midterm of 1883. In terms of social background, at the time students at this boarding school primarily hailed from the British upper middle and upper classes, with graduates later taking on some of the most responsible and privileged positions in British society.² In order to maintain their class-consciousness

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and become ‘leading men’ of the British Empire, the students at Harrow, as in all English public schools at the time, were instructed in the Classics and in Protestant religiosity, and underwent a comprehensive programme of physical education, with a strong emphasis on team-games. Through this programme, combined with the formal prefect and flogging system as well as informal forms of bullying, pupils learnt to obey, but also to lead.³

At the time that Wigram was a student, pupils at public schools were not only of British descent, but might also come from continental families and distant locations in the Empire, including British India. The extended Apcar family of Arminian merchants from Calcutta, for example, sent at least ten of their sons to Harrow during the 1860s and 1870s.⁴ Such instances were not unusual, as British—and more broadly European—education was considered a means for intermediaries of the empires to become ‘Western-educated *respectables*’,⁵ who engaged with cosmopolitan ideals, taking on aspects of British and European culture as well as their own culture, as it suited them. Four of the Harrow-educated Apcar men, for example, subsequently became members of the Calcutta bar, each demonstrating their respectable position as an attorney in British Indian society.⁶

Edmund F.E. Wigram, similar to many of his contemporaries who attended boarding school, continued his education at Trinity College Cambridge, where he obtained a Bachelor of Arts and subsequently a Master of Arts, before becoming a curate of St. James’s in Hatcham (1889–1891). In November 1891, he was accepted as a Church Mission Society (CMS) missionary and was consequently sent to Lahore, in the Punjab, British India.⁷ His work there centred on education, including a position from 1893 as the temporary master at the Baring High School in Batala, which was also a boys’ boarding school.⁸ At the beginning of 1893, Edmund Wigram wrote of the work that he and his sister, Ellenor Selina Wigram, had before them in Batala, noting that: “The school motto translated into English is, ‘Light in the Punjab’. The motto of ourselves and our fellow-workers must therefore be, ‘Light in the School’, or in other words, ‘Christ’s Light in us’”.⁹

Unlike Harrow, which focused on shaping young British men for leading roles in Britain and its Empire, the Baring Boarding High School focused upon converting local pupils into Christians, in the hope that they might help convert other local people to Christianity. For example, Bhagwan Dass, a student of the school who was on his way home for the holidays in the late 1880s, wrote to his teacher Miss Charlotte

M. Tucker, an honorary missionary for the Church of England Zenana Society, stating that: “God gave us the power to preach at nearly every place on our journey”.¹⁰ Yet, conversion was not an easy step to take, as Khair Ullah, another student, found. His relatives were disappointed in his decision to convert to Christianity, and he was subsequently rejected from his broader Muslim community.¹¹ Thus, his decision to convert to Christianity while attending a Christian boarding school and subsequently to seek inclusion in a Christian community excluded him from his own religious and broader community.

Khair Ullah, Bhagwan Dass, Edmund F.E. Wigram, and the Apar sons are just a few examples from the many thousands of pupils attending boarding schools in various places across the globe during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Their experiences were vastly different, yet they shared the experience of being separated from their families and childhood friends in order to sleep, eat, learn, and move within the boarding school’s limited spatial sites. This edited collection frames these boarding schools as a global and transcultural phenomenon of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We examine the ways in which these schools, which became popular in the late eighteenth century and continue until today, extracted, and at times excluded, pupils from their original social background in order to train, mould, and shape them so that they could fit into their perceived position in broader society—a form of inclusion. Here we are interested in the concepts of inclusion and of exclusion in order to describe a historical process and the slippages between such categories, rather than assuming a normative understanding of these terms. At times, the projected notions of a pupil’s position in society reflected those of the parents, and in other places, the imagined future for the child was vastly different, and the pupil was rejected from the community from which they originated, falling between the gaps of societies. In this way, boarding schools predominantly affected the education of two particular groups: the children of underprivileged classes and those of the ‘elite’, with these groups widespread around the (European dominated) world. Boarding schools, like education institutions more broadly, utilised global and transnational networks and interdependences of ideas, practices, and people—as exemplified in the cases of Bhagwan Dass, Khair Ullah, and the larger Wigram and Apar families.¹²

This edited volume brings together detailed case studies dealing with various aspects of the issues raised above. The historians writing these case studies of boarding schools in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

come from a wide range of countries. In this volume, they focus on the transnational and global similarities and interdependences, but also on the local and temporal differences and particularities of boarding schools. Within our collection, we are particularly interested in the experiences of people either at boarding schools or affected by these institutions, the global networks which they form, as well as the processes and practices that boarding schools both engage in and help to create. In this introduction, we outline some commonalities of the case studies, but also some differences and contradictions. We begin by attempting to define what exactly we understand as a boarding school, sketching very briefly the history of the phenomenon as such, as well as the varied forms of institution which existed throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In a second section, we situate our collection within the broader historical research that has been undertaken on boarding schools, as well as within research on global and transnational entanglements in education. In a third step, we introduce the structure of the volume and its chapters in more detail.

A WORD ON ‘BOARDING SCHOOLS’: COMMON FEATURES AND DIFFERENT PURPOSES

We take boarding schools here to be discrete sites where the school’s pupils are educated on the property, eat meals in a common space, and sleep exclusively on the school property during term time. The admission to boarding schools is limited by means of social and group selection, by entrance exams, or costs, and their internal structure is characterised by specific power relations between pupils and teachers, but also amongst pupils, by timetables that regulate the students’ lives as well as by cohesion or fragmentation of social networks within the schools. We include in our analysis boarding schools for the elite and those for children from low socio-economic backgrounds, or children considered ‘at risk’ and subsequently extracted from their birth families and primary social background by the broader society. The majority of our case studies examine schools exclusively for boarding pupils. Some of the schools in our collection could also be termed residential homes, for the children were not allowed to return to their families before finishing school, or were considered not to have a family to whom they could return. Generally speaking, boarding schools for ‘at risk’ pupils were funded by the state or benevolent supporters, compared to elite schools which often had high tuition,

boarding costs, and entrance exams associated with them. Indeed, as the case studies in our volume demonstrate, boarding schools were institutions that mostly targeted the elite and the abject, as ways of shaping national and colonial subjects. Increasingly from the eighteenth century, these subjects were created as waves of globalisation and ensuing colonialisation engulfed much of the world. Histories of boarding schools have tended to focus on either elite schools or on schools for marginalised sectors of the population. In bringing the histories of these together in a transnational perspective, we open up the conversation between various types of schools.

In his seminal study on asylums, Erving Goffman categorised boarding schools as one kind of “total institution”, arguing that they were similar to army barracks, work camps, and colonial compounds. As such, they belonged to one group of such institutions which were “purportedly established the better to pursue some worklike [sic] task and justifying themselves only on these instrumental grounds”.¹³ Even though Goffman’s categorisation might plausibly be criticised due to its ahistorical assumption that boarding schools were totally “cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time”¹⁴—a criticism that we also make—his concept provides valuable guidance for navigating the ‘inner world’ of boarding schools. His concept emphasises how groups of teachers, students, and house staff¹⁵ played different roles within the school community, how they were related to each other in formal and informal power structures, as well as the tensions which could exist within these groups—for example, between headmasters and ordinary teachers, or between older and younger pupils. Goffman’s concept also suggests ways in which different social actors tried to make sense of their life in boarding schools, including through everyday practices and rituals that were guided by tradition and house rules, and enforced by rewards as well as (corporal) punishment.

Goffman’s concept succinctly encapsulates the world into which a student entered when she or he first went to boarding school. Having successfully applied, or being forcibly sent there, the pupils regularly went through a series of formal and informal initiation rituals that signalled their admission into the school community. Such *rites de passage* could be a simple handshake between parent and schoolmaster, symbolising the official handover of the children, or more physically extreme experiences, such as when the child’s hair was cut to normative cultural standards,

or when they were dressed in the school uniform. Commonly, admission also included an informal initiation ritual, such as when older and more experienced students forced the newcomers to drink repulsive beverages or abused them with physical violence.¹⁶ Such informal initiation rituals also had the intention of showing the younger students where they stood within the hierarchy of the school. The power structure within boarding schools was of course first and foremost moulded by the relationship between pupils and teachers; the latter often trying to enforce their position through a meticulous disciplinary regime of observation and supervision, of gratification and punishment.¹⁷ Headmasters often played a prominent role within the hierarchy, as did older pupils who as prefects were entrusted with the power to oversee younger students and to discipline them to a certain extent. In addition to the formal disparity between pupils—nowhere more obvious than in the fagging system of the Victorian public school—there frequently existed informal hierarchies amongst students, established by means of reputation and bullying.¹⁸ Mary Hatfield in her chapter describes how the practice of fagging was evident in nineteenth century Ireland, whereas in their chapter, De-Valera N.Y.M. Botchway and Baffour Boaten Boahen-Boaten demonstrate how these European-inspired traditions were transferred to colonial spaces, such as Ghana, and became part of the boarding school culture.

Power structures and disciplinary regimes substantially predetermine everyday life in boarding schools, but they only partly determine the aims and purpose of the school. Focusing only on these power structures and disciplinary regimes overlooks other experiences, such as community building, support structures, and entanglements with communities external to the school. Nevertheless, spatial regimes did determine how teachers and students could make use of space, that is, in setting boundaries to activities outside and inside of the school, and in establishing rules regarding where the pupils had to learn, play games, and sleep. Spatial regimes also overlapped with temporal regimes in the form of daily timetables and weekly schedules which the teachers regulated. These temporal regimes determined when students (and teachers) had to wake up, be in class or have lunch, and one might enjoy leisure time and join in activities such as singing and dancing.¹⁹ Yet power structures and disciplinary regimes could only marginally determine curricular content and the subjects taught at the boarding schools in question. Structures and regimes differed largely from school to school, depending on the student body, which was mostly either composed of the children of marginalised

classes or those of the leading strata. Practices and rituals in both kinds of boarding schools varied. Schools for the underprivileged mainly focused on the instruction of basic knowledge, manual labour, and simple piety to form the children into diligent workers, faithful believers, and loyal citizens. Those for upper-class children offered ambitious courses in classics and modern languages, and encouraged independency through games and debating classes.²⁰

Such examples underscore the importance of placing boarding schools, their participants, and their practices within their historical and cultural context. In this regard, Pierre Bourdieu's idea of a close entanglement between a society, its elites, and hegemonic cultural ideas and the educational institutions of the time clearly surpasses the generic concept of boarding schools as 'total institutions', as outlined by Goffman.²¹ Michel Foucault also provides us with ways of thinking about boarding schools, along with other institutions such as army barracks, as ways in which 'modern' societies can discipline individuals through uses of time, space, examinations, and hierarchies.²² The disciplining of time and space are a continuum between European convent schools in the Middle Ages and present-day boarding schools. Nevertheless, what differentiates our 'modern' boarding schools from the former are integrated pedagogical concepts and the overwhelming function of the schools as a conduit which guides the majority of the pupils into their prescribed place in society after the termination of their education. This sits in contrast with the European convent schools of the Middle Ages, which, although commonly considered the origin of 'modern' boarding schools, had a different educational focus, primarily in their training for religious orders. Outside of Europe, religious schools, such as the Buddhist temples and monastic colleges called *Pirivena* in Sri Lanka, also boarded young scholars and similarly provided a mostly religious education.²³

Religious education was also a significant aspect of the first 'modern' European boarding schools. Especially during the Age of Reformation, Protestants and Catholics alike founded new schools to educate their children. These schools often offered boarding options.²⁴ One well-known example is the *Franckesche Stiftung* in Halle which was established and directed by the Protestant pedagogue and theologian August Hermann Francke (1663–1737). The *Franckesche Stiftung* in Halle is recognised as one of the first 'modern' boarding schools in continental Europe. It provided a day school, but also a boarding school for orphans, as well as one for members of nobility.²⁵ While contemporaries identified these

institutions as ‘schools’ focusing on the education of young children and youth alone, secondary and tertiary education have long been a part of the higher education system. Thus, universities can also be deemed another important inspiration of the ‘modern’ boarding school system. This is evident in relation to the German ‘Bursen’ as well as to the fact that in the British case the public school system had its origin partly in the Oxbridge tutorial system.²⁶

Another point of origin of boarding schools as we recognise them today is to be found during the time of the European Enlightenment in the second half of the eighteenth century. Since then, and especially during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the system of boarding schools was successfully spread around the globe—as we argue in this volume. Underlying the transformation of boarding schools was the fundamental idea that education was the appropriate means for all men—in the thinking of the European Enlightenment not uncommonly understood as male persons only—to become (self-)critical and responsible citizens. A common belief held that universal education had to begin at a young age and be as distant as possible from the ‘wrong’ type of social influence in order that education would be successful. Boarding schools were able to provide exclusion from some aspects of society as they separated pupils from their local environments. The French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau elaborated on these thoughts most broadly in his treatise *Émile, or On Education*, which was first published in French in 1762. The work is divided into five books that correspond to five different periods of a person’s life. It follows the education of the young Émile, who is predominantly raised far away from society and its apparently bad influence, in order to develop his own mental and physical strengths and grow into an independent ‘new’ citizen and man.²⁷ The ideas of Rousseau and other thinkers of the Enlightenment resulted in the foundation of a number of experimental boarding schools in different European countries, such as the institute established by Christian Gotthilf Salzmann in Schnepfenthal in Thuringia in 1784.²⁸ More generally, Rousseau’s treatise encouraged the belief that every human being could be transformed by means of a general European-inspired education.

The idea that children—especially boys—should receive systematic and extensive education from an early age prevailed in European societies in the aftermath of the Enlightenment and inspired many attempts to introduce compulsory schooling in various European locations. Yet, although some educational ‘reformers’ of the nineteenth century shared the general

conclusions of Rousseau and his contemporaries, others did not follow their positive perception of the child as an innocent being which had to be nurtured and enabled. On the contrary, they—many of whom were Protestant theologians—doubted their innocent nature and stressed that “education’s chief end was to rectify the ‘corrupt nature and evil disposition’” of children.²⁹ Increasingly such ideas were levelled at the poor, with the writings of the early nineteenth-century British pedagogue and instigator of popular education, Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth, illustrating the need for education for the children of the poor working class in order for the betterment of self and society.³⁰

Apart from attempts to ‘reform’ the offspring of poor and socially disadvantaged families in social homes, until the end of the nineteenth century it was generally believed that the best education a child could receive was at home. Yet solutions had to be found when home-education was impossible. For children of the upper classes, this was often the case when they had to attend (secondary) schools in specific locations. In Germany, for example, in order to attend further schooling (*Gymnasium*) older boys often needed to be sent away from home, stay in foreign cities and live in private pensions, many with dubious reputations.³¹ In England, where boys from upper-class families traditionally attended preparatory and public boarding schools from the age of six, they were generally without supervision when not in class. This changed in the early nineteenth century, starting with educators such as Thomas Arnold, who as Headmaster of the elite school Rugby introduced the housing system to the English public school, assigning every boy to a ‘house’ over which a master presided.³² Although newer research has critically examined the actual impact of Arnold’s ‘reforms’ and has emphasised the importance of other reformers such as Edward Thring of Uppingham,³³ together these initiatives led to a partial familiarisation of public boarding schools—for boys as well as girls³⁴—and their close entanglement with the leading families of their countries, their ideas and traditions.

While educationalists, headmasters, and teachers tried hard to include parents and families of upper-class children in boarding school education, this was not at all the case with the education of children from underprivileged families. Attempts to ‘rescue’ children from poor and underprivileged backgrounds are common throughout history. Yet, following the Enlightenment idea that education could help all people to become better individuals, boarding schools became especially popular with social reformers from the first half of the nineteenth century. Coupled with

the semantics of charity and brotherhood, which accompanied religious sentiments in many European societies at the time, there was a tremendous growth in children's homes such as orphanages, ragged schools, and training ships.³⁵ Mostly established by Christians with middle- and upper-class backgrounds, these institutions were intended to teach children basic knowledge, manual skills, and moral values to enable them to gain respectability in their stations in life. Yet, even though parents and families often sent their children willingly to such institutions, there are also many reported examples of "philanthropic kidnapping".³⁶ In these cases, children were forcefully taken away from their parents under the presumption that the parents could not care for their own children, or under the presumption that the families of the children could not uphold (Protestant) family values. While parents often had little chance to contradict such decisions and children did not enjoy the same liberties as the upper-class offspring in their boarding schools, children in both residential homes and elite boarding schools had opportunities to adapt and integrate, or resist and oppose the exclusionary environment in which they were willingly or forcibly placed.

It is thus the residential children's homes, rather than the elite public schools for upper-class children, that serve as the primary example for the global spread of the boarding school in the time of Empire. From the turn of the nineteenth century, at a heightened period of British humanitarianism, there was a concerted effort to provide for children of the poor and children in the colonies, partly as a form of care and partly as a means of disciplining society.³⁷ Men such as Andrew Bell, a chaplain in Madras, India, adapted monitorial systems for British schools, demonstrating the entwined connection between multiple spatial ties and also across socially constructed categories such as race and class.³⁸ Simultaneously, Joseph Lancaster developed a monitorial system, which was used by the British and Foreign School Society (BFSS) for the poor in England and the colonised throughout the Empire. These two examples are paradigmatic of the ways in which pedagogical concepts such as the monitoring system spread throughout the British Empire, including into boarding schools in the colonies. Such schools harboured similar world-views, based upon British nineteenth-century notions of liberalism, humanitarianism, and racial hierarchies. The curricula of the BFSS schools were heavily Bible-based and infused with British ideas of morality, demonstrating a close link between Enlightenment education, social reform, and evangelism.³⁹ The boarding school was an important form of schooling in the colonies

which was used to spread Christian morality, especially amongst children considered to be orphans or children of ‘heathen’ mothers. In British India, boarding schools were also used to provide education to children of army personnel and their local Indian partners, as Tim Allender has demonstrated.⁴⁰ They thus represented sites which were used to mitigate anxieties about race, religion, gender, and class.

Within other (post)colonial settings, such as Australia, Canada, and the United States, boarding schools were used by governments, often with the collaboration of religious groups, to break children’s connection with their communities and to force European episteme upon them as a way to “kill the Indian, and save the child”.⁴¹ After attending boarding schools, Indigenous pupils were expected to be integrated into settler colonial society, with new notions of their place within society drawn from European episteme. The employment opportunities predominantly available to former Indigenous pupils in settler colonies and in the African colonies were low-status and low-paid manual or domestic roles. These, as Rebecca Swartz demonstrates in her chapter, were not the roles that African elites envisaged for themselves. Through instruction and indoctrination in (often) Christian boarding (and residential) schools in settler colonial spaces, under the logic of elimination, Indigenous pupils were actively denied access to Indigenous land, culture, and language.⁴² Although there were some cases in which Indigenous people actively used boarding-school education to integrate into settler colonial society, as Janne Lahti demonstrates in his chapter on the Chiricahua Apache Jason Betzinez, the more common experience was marginalisation from both their culture of origin as well as settler colonial society.⁴³ The ubiquitous marginalisation of Indigenous peoples from settler societies provided structural inequalities that consequently concealed the physical, emotional, and sexual abuse of children at the hands of those who were meant to be protecting them, and precluded discussion of such topics in mainstream debate.⁴⁴ In Canada, a government commission has examined the legacies of Canada’s Residential Schools and noted the litany of abuse to which First Nations peoples were subjected.⁴⁵ In Australia, a National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, known as the *Bringing Them Home Report*, highlighted the forced removal of Aboriginal children and the abuse that many children were subjected to in institutional homes and training schools.⁴⁶

The abuse of children under care in boarding schools was, and is, tragically not limited by class, race, space, or time.⁴⁷ Such abuse can disturbingly be found in boarding schools across the globe and across the socially constructed categories of class and race. That said, the marginalisation of Indigenous people from settler society compounded the silencing of victims and facilitated the continuation of abusive practices. Within boarding schools not all children were victims, nor were all teachers perpetrators. The chapters in our collection describe abuse and violence, but also resistance and resilience to boarding-school violence. This was expressed in many ways, from passive to active resistance, with children, parents, and also teachers engaging in various acts. By placing various forms of boarding schools in the same framework we do not intend to diminish or relativise traumatic experiences of children, their parents or communities, nor are we suggesting that the strict discipline of an elite boarding school is comparable to the cultural genocidal practices of boarding schools for Indigenous peoples. Rather what we hope to highlight by examining various forms of boarding schools within the same frame is to show both that exclusionary practices may have underscored inclusionary ideologies, and the ways in which external influences seeped into the allegedly exclusive space of the boarding school.

RESEARCH ON BOARDING SCHOOLS: STATE OF THE ART AND OUR APPROACH

Our edited collection is one of the first to produce a global and transnational history of boarding schools. It focuses more on the people involved and their practices and networks than the history of a single institution or one particular ‘system’. Studies of boarding schools, particularly those with a narrow focus on elite schools in Europe and the United States, often focus on structural aspects of the schools, with many studies on contemporaneous boarding schools having an ideological agenda, such as to defend the privatisation of education. Such studies commonly either deal with the idea of a generalised system of elite boarding schools or focus on the peculiarities of singular schools.⁴⁸ Since the late nineteenth century, former students, teachers, and admirers of European and American boarding schools have published recollections of their alma mater to praise its achievements and highlight its many famous alumni. These laudatory histories have often neglected the many other pupils who lived a ‘normal life’. They have also often failed to address critical questions

of physical and sexual abuse and of class, gender, and racial bias. In the early twentieth century, the genre of school memoirs was professionalised, which led to numerous monographs that uncritically recounted the history of a single elite boarding school. It was also around this time that academics began to examine elite boarding schools as a generalised system of elite education. The English public schools were of special interest in this regard, with historians and sociologists exploring their political function in elite formation and policy-making in the British Empire during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁴⁹ With the rise of social history in the 1960s and 1970s, experts increasingly examined the social function of such schools and extended their scope beyond Great Britain to the United States and beyond.⁵⁰

Following the trends in other historiographies, historical research on boarding schools went through a major shift in the 1980s when cultural historians began asking questions about everyday life, various types of practices; gender; class; and—still very marginally—about transnational and global entanglements. The development can be illustrated with regard to the historiography on British elite boarding schools. Books such as John Chandos' *Boys Together* (1984) or Christine Heward's *Making a Man of Him* (1988) strongly focus on the everyday life of boys in English public schools during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These books demonstrated the large discrepancy between the ideology of elite education and its quotidian practices, which included physical abuse in the form of fagging and bullying and sexual misconduct from pupils and teachers, as well as intimate friendships and alternative masculine behaviour. In order to come to their conclusions, cultural historians turned to non-traditional sources such as diaries, letters, and punishment books, and read traditional sources such as pupils' registers against the grain.⁵¹ One of the most prominent researchers on British public schools from the perspective of cultural history has been James A. Mangan. In his many publications on Athleticism and the British Empire, he has demonstrated how the cult of games increasingly prevailed in everyday life in British public schools since the 1860s, evolving into its own ideology that shaped the image of the public school boy by the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁵² Mangan was also a pioneer in exploring the expansive connections between public schools, their elite ideology, and its impact on the British Empire. He elucidated how the pupils in these schools learnt to use instruments of power and persuasion, which