Ordinariness and/or Distancing from Eliteness

**Interviewee 1 – elites are ‘blokes’**

EW: If we think about like this question of influence like I suppose, who does have influence then, it doesn't. Is it in. We've got a strange elite class.

MM: Well you have to be a bloke. You have to be a bloke, and you have to sell your soul.

**Interviewee 2 – Elites are not me, they are ‘sports’ people**

EW: If we think about the overarching project as a kind of last question really, we’re thinking about people of influence, people who were perhaps an elite like, do you consider yourself someone who is part of an elite or no? Why not? Who do you think who do you think is the elite?

JW: No. I suppose sportsmen always come to mind, in the first instance. And I think, I think one thing that is really important to understand is that in every sphere there are those that for one reason or another have come to the top of the pile. But nowhere in any other sector are they regarded with the same iconic sectors as they are in sport. And in many respects, this is what disturbs me, actually, when sporting role models get into trouble or don't become role models anymore, is actually because they could play a major role across society in allowing us to understand how important role models are, almost in every sector of society. Because they're the only ones who really have that kind of iconic status. Because politicians come and go. Come and go, you know. Other than sportsman, and I think there is a role that they could play because… You’ve only gotta think of somebody like Fred Perry in tennis. But they have an ongoing status that pervades society as a whole. And no other, in no other kind of environment is that so. Um, which actually then disturbs me about the fact that you know when role models… Yes, they've got her characters, yes, they got their personalities and so they should, or they wouldn't be role models. But um, I think as long as society understands what's good and bad about what they do and what they don't do, then there is a lot to learn.

**Interviewee 3 – ‘I’m not influential’**

EW - Yeah (laughter). And I suppose like kind of overall, I'm just, yeah, interested-, I think you kind of touched on it earlier, but do you see yourself as an influential person? Like with everything you've achieved, you don't see that, no?

SN - No, absolutely not. And that, I think that's down to the fact that I've never wanted recognition for what I do. So, I find it embarrassing to-, you know, sort of the thing that-, you know, I've been quite happy being vice president of the Institute because I can get everything in place, I can get all the (unclear). But (pause), is the outward facing bit going to be as exciting? (laughter) Probably not.

EW - (laughter) It might be!

SN - So, I don't see myself as influential. And I, you know, I don't know-, you know, the girl’s joke, my two girls, and I go what have I got to live up to? Here she goes again! But I don't know why, but I've always been a person that's-, I’ve never blown my own trumpet, I can’t, that's not who I am. And it's about achievement of what I want people to do rather than my achievement.

**Interviewee 4 – ‘I’m not that well-known’**

EW: Do you feel like you had quite a prestigious career? How do you feel when you look back on it? You know, we are wanting to interview women who we we feel have had prestigious careers and you're one of them, does that resonate with you? Does that kind of reflect, you know, your experience?

VG: I mean I was quite surprised when you contacted me 'cause I don’t think I’m very well known in the outside world, so I wondered how you got hold of me actually. I mean I do feel that the work and me being a spokesman for this aspect has had an effect…but I don't think my, I don't think that people know my name outside my field. I’m known in my field , but I don't think I'm not known by the general public at all.

**Interview 5 – ‘I don’t think I have much influence now’**

EW: Do you see yourself as somebody who's influential? Or we might use the term elite? Like do you feel like that about your experiences or not?

RP: I think I was very lucky because of my background. I do come from an intellectual aristocracy in a way, seen from that perspective. So I was very lucky in that and I didn't realize how lucky I was. But I didn't have any sort of entrepreneurial spirit or anything like that. And I didn't know how to make a career in any way…And you know when I was doing the column in the newspaper, I had sort of influence then, I don't think I have much influence now in the literary world, but it shifts industry, the literary world shifts the whole time.

**Interview 6 – ‘I have not had a major influence’**

EW - Yeah, and do you think that that's-, do you feel like that's quite influential within academia? Do you think that's-, if we're thinking about things that make your career kind of influential, is that one of them? Does that feel like it has a real impact on academia?

GC - That’s-, you know, the question of influence and especially in the public sphere, that was what made me feel rather doubtful (unclear), because I wouldn't have said that I did have major influence, I don’t think this is impostor syndrome, that I write quite well, and I quite often feel that people like the books. I don't know whether they would have had a major impact, and I haven't had many doctoral students because typically of course we send them on to Oxbridge. And in terms of, say, these funding things, obviously it does not depend just on me. It’s other people involved, otherwise it just wouldn't be fair. So, this is really all really useful stuff, but I wouldn't have said it was a major influence

**Interview 7 – being included in WW ‘made me laugh like hell’**

Itt was quite something to be invited to be in Who's Who, which made me laugh like hell.

EW: How do you feel about it?

KC: I was just amazed because I didn't think anybody would even search for me in Who's Who.

**Interview 8 – ‘I don’t have wider influence’**

EW: When you think about your career... I mean, from the outside, objectively, it just seems like such an amazing career, so prestigious, so influential. Do you feel influential in that space or in that in the public sphere or in your specific area of art in fashion? Do you have that sense of yourself?

CW: I think I don't use my power, if you like, or my influence overtly. So within the V&A I think that I am respected in the museum and I do have influence, even though... I mean, in terms of wider influence, I'm not really… The community I felt most nervous of is the academic community, because you know I've never worked up to, you know… When I do references and citations and footnotes I always have to look it up to remember how it's done. You know, it doesn't come naturally. And that sort of language, the language of academia, I can find quite intimidating. But it hasn't stopped me being a professor, so. I guess because I haven't got a PhD or even an masters. I've got an honorary PhD. So I do sometimes feel as if I'm… like when I read papers, sometimes I have to read them several times to understand them. So I do sometimes feel a bit sort of insecure in that field and I do sometimes worry that I've not done enough primary research. I haven't really had time. And I think I've learned to not compare myself to other people as much as I used to, I used to always… and because it's a field full of women, almost exclusively, you know, I’ve sometimes felt… You know that sort of intimidation. A little part of me, probably the mother in me saying, don't get too confident, don't get above your station, don’t, you know.

**Interview 9 – I never thought of myself as having a career**

EW: Do feel like you have more influence in the architecture world now through all these things that you do?

JH: In many way I do, you know, you're right, I do. And I'm regarded as a voice worth listening to, which is terribly nice, terribly nice, aren't I lucky. It's not what I knew would happen. It's certainly not what I would call it a…. I've never thought of myself as having a career actually. I mean, I do, you know, obviously I did have one, but I never thought ‘what shall my career be’. The word ‘career’ was not one I ever used. I mean I have contemporaries in the architectural world who knew what sort of practice they wanted to run. I never did. I just did it.

**Interview 11 – ‘I don’t think I’ve had a big influence at all**

JR - But sorry, when you were going to say about influence, I don't think individually I have had any massive influence at all.

**Interview 12 – sort of acknowledges influnece but doesn’t feel it day to day**

EW: Does it feel like you have influence within the world of your field? Is it experienced like that from your perspective?

ET: If I sat back and look at it, yes. I’d have to sit back and look at it and go, oh yes, I suppose I do.

EW: But it doesn't feel like that on a day-to-day basis?

ET: Not really.

**Interview 13 – I think influence implies there's a power structure that you're part of or you can affect. And I think writers tend to stand a bit outside all of that**

EW: Do you feel like there are moments or spheres in which you do feel influential? Or does that not read as an experience that makes sense to you?

L: I don't think I'm influential. If I am at the moment it's not as a novelist because I haven't published in 10 years. It's more as a member of Extinction Rebellion and someone who co-founded Writers Rebel. But I still wouldn't call that having much influence, I assure you. So, no, that's not how I see myself.

EW: Do you think in the 2000s, do you think that you felt like you had influence in the literary world then or not really?

L: Influence? I feel like I’ve had a name. But what would I have influenced? I think influence implies there's a power structure that you're part of or you can affect. And I think writers tend to stand a bit outside all of that, you know. We’re not there to influence people, we’re there to sort of get people to interrogate themselves or to entertain them. We are sort of part of the entertainment industry.

**Interview 14 – does recognise influence**

We're doing a project about kind of influential people, people influential in their professions or in society, do you see yourself as part of that category of people? Does that make sense to you, as seeing yourself as an influential person?

KQ: Yeah, it does. It does.

**Interview 15 – does recognise influence**

do you feel like, does that make sense to you seeing yourself as somebody who has been influential in certain aspects of the public sphere and in your professional life?

NH - I mean, it's definitely the case, because I get told every single day that I have inspired young girls to pursue careers, and to go on to have children, and to go back to work after they've had children. I'm told that *every day* by people I just meet in supermarkets, (they) come up to me and say, “Aren’t you Nicola? I read your book when I was 18 and I've had this really successful career and I've, you know, and I've had children and I've carried on working.” And, you know, undoubtedly, I was a role model, and I'm very glad that I was, that there were people who were inspired to follow in my footsteps. So that's great. I'm very pleased about that.

**Interview 16 – does recognise influence but not ruling class**

what I realised when I left the BBC, so yes, definitely power of influence, I had influence, and I realised as I went on that you had real influence. So, I remember once, coming out of a press conference at the Home Office, and by this time

I was literally being invited in by Home Secretaries or by Prime Ministers to talk to them about what was going on, and they would know me by name, and at this point I would, I remember once for example walking out of a press conference and saying ‘the Home Secretary’, he'd admitted that the Home Office made a big flaw and it was the days when the book stopped with the politician.

MG - Yeah, well, there was certainly, we've never moved up to these sort of, you know, this sort of ‘the ruling classes set.’

EW - (laughter) Who do you think is the ruling classes? I mean, that sounds like a strange question, but in Britain now?

MG - I mean granted there really obvious that they're wealthy landowners, and they’re a little bit posh, and they're in with the Royals, and they're in with a few politicians, and then it, you know.

**Interview 17 – doesn’t really answer but plays down influence indirectly**

EW - And if we're thinking about this kind of question of influence, like do you think that role is the one in which you have the most influence kind of in the public sphere or to shape policy or is there something you've done before or after that you think has been more influential?

AS - I don't think that period shaped public policy particularly,

**Slater 31 – admits elite but pushes back on notion of inheriting it**

RES: Yes the elite. Totally yes.

**INT:** **I'm sort of interested in how that lands with you personally do you consider yourself in that way, if so why, if not, why? Does that when somebody says that to you does that, do you balk, are you sort of proud at some level because it's a symbol of a certain degree of achievement and does it match I suppose your experience of the power and authority that you had at that point in your life and still do?**

**[00:40:26]**

RES: Yes sure and unfortunately I am going we'll have to do the rest of it later, objectively speaking when I was running the department of education, that I was in the elite wasn't I. Now that I'm not, I don't know if the elite carries on being the elite. I think the elite came with my role –

**INT:** **It’s interesting, you won't ever get taken out of Who's Who so that's –**

RES: That's true and I was happy to be in it and gave them some stuff for it, so I certainly you know happy to be thought of in that way, I suppose the point I'm making is I was termed an elite because of what I was doing not that because, well I wasn't born to it.

**Le Grand – 35 admits and embraces elitenes**

Firstly the markers, yes it did feel like a marker of success. There were two others which, one was being on the Any Questions panel, five times I was on the Any Questions panel. I remember somebody saying to me, “I think I've achieved the peak of my career when I’ve been on Any Questions.” and there was a bit of me that felt like that, the other was being in The Guardian Birthdays, but yes, I also wanted to be a Fellow of the British Academy I thought that was quite important, that I came really late so yes there were those kind of markers and I was keen on them, yes. I was pleased when I got them and I would like to say I felt ambivalent about them being [unclear 00:48:00] but to be perfectly honest, I don't think I did. Intellectually I know I should have done, again my concerns about equity and social justice and of course I know about the work that you do and so on I knew that it wasn't entirely because of my own merits that I'd got to where I'd got to. But I was nonetheless pleased I’d done it

**36 Haldane – establishment – what the fuck are you talking about?**

RES: No I obviously wouldn't, the new place at the [s/l RSO 00:35:24] I was sitting with the fellows answering some questions and it was a couple of weeks ago, and the first question was, the first line was, “As a member of the British establishment,” that was the opening bit, what the fuck are you on about? And of course, if you read the CV now there is nothing you know, I live in Surrey, I've had more than 30 years at the Bank of England, I'm now working in government you know come on get with it, but of course I wouldn't remotely think of myself as being-

**INT:** **What's that about?**

RES: I don't know, I suppose in my own mind’s eye the concept of what the establishment means is a million miles away from- That feels almost like not inherited wealth, but inherited power; nothing inherited about my power basically as far as I have any at all. So no, I still consider myself as working class so I would not consider myself in any way shape or form as establishment or elite.

**49 – Anthony Barnes**

with a background like the one I’ve described the elite are in escapable

suppose in all of those and in the various places I’ve been employed in all the communities I’ve worked in that sort of thing, I’ve obviously drawn on the- what I’ve learnt from the elite background as much as I can.  I mean it’s like a wonderful bank account.  But I- I’ve I suppose purposely tried to see that people don’t give me extra respect because I talk proper and all of that sort of thing.

50 – Antohny

**Andd I get the feeling that you’re very resistant to that framing of yourself [as elite].**

RES: Yes.

**David baker – pushes back**

RES: I cannot for the life of me imagine someone who spends his main working career at principal level in a govt department could conceivably be thought of as elite.

RES: I think that the-- there is a danger in using the word elites in this because there is a huge amount of baggage.

RES: And I suspect that not all of that baggage applies to my own life experience.

58 – Peter Bennett jones

RES: A bit like in your survey it said do you consider yourself to be a member of an elite and I said no, because I hate the concept of that.

RES: Yes, okay.  It’s just the word elite.

**INT:** **Yes, tell me what does that word, where does that word land with you?**

RES: Even though I went to the ultimate elite educational institutions, you know.

**INT:** **Yes.**

RES: It, and I don’t know it’s just, it’s a bit like the class wars.

**INT:** **Yes.**

RES: You know, class things, it just makes me feel innately uncomfortable, in particular.  Whereas influence, you know I-

**INT:** **Yes.**

RES: There was, it’s dying off now and I’m perfectly happy with that and, you know one of those things to do.  I think there was a time where I could more or less get through to anybody.  In this country.

60 – bovey

RES: There's no doubt about the sacrifice to honours my colleagues in the firm where I trained I wouldn't they said that they did bigger things they certainly made a great deal more money. What is interesting is none of them were in Who's Who even though they were leading city lawyers. I just saw it as being I don't think it is quite the same now, but certainly at the time it came with the rations and one had no illusions that one just because the civil service, the civil service is very good at regarding itself as being a level above and at that stage professors got automatically into Who's Who then the university decided that they were going to make lots of professors because people were complaining and Who's Who stopped putting them in and it was like that.

61

RES: I don't know what that means really.  I mean, what do you think it means?

**INT:** **Well, I mean, partly that’s what this project is trying to interrogate to some extent.  But I suppose it's one of those very polysemic terms that you can associate it with excellence and, you know, and is used in that way in terms of elite athlete or elite- Other types of monikers.  But it also has very different connotations socio-politically, but that’s partly why we're so interested in people's reactions.  But I suppose the basic point here would be that it connotes people at the very top of British society who power, influence and are shaping Britain.  And so that’s really what I'm asking you, whether you feel part of that.**

RES: Well, I mean, I don’t know whether I'd answer that.  I mean, I feel quite elite in the sense of excellence within my profession.  So in that sense, yes.  I've felt elite in the sense of economically and socially probably be- I mean within the profession again.  If you were to message by reference to income, for example, then I would say yes, definitely so.  But that’s part of the function within the commercial part.  My wife, who's a doctor, would say that we get massively overpaid for what we do, compared with what a hospital consultant does, and that sort of thing.

62 – Bell

RES: Well, no I don’t think I’m a member of the elite.

**INT:** **Why?**

RES: For a start you know I left the Civil Service in 1996 and ever since I’ve been a consultant – well to start with I was with a defence company doing consultancy work of sort that suits me very well but nobody could describe it as something to do with the elite I’m not telephoned by Cabinet Ministers or Permanent Secretaries or whatever. So I don’t regard myself in that sense as an elite. And of course you know I’m 80 the world has changed a lot since I was in the Civil Service and the Ministry of Defence certainly has. So I don’t really regard myself as a member of the elite I mean I do regard myself as exceedingly fortunate. I was fortunate to go to Winchester I think it suited me very well and fortunately I was able to end up in the Ministry of Defence which suited me very well as well. I regard myself as lucky rather than anything else. In effect I ended up doing things which suited such terms that I had it was excellent with very few exceptions I was really happy doing what I did in my career.

1201

**PARTICIPANT 1:** Well, again, I don't like the term "elite". Partly, I think because you need to qualify it. If for example, you said the political elite, you'd be talking about, in my view, the top level of people in politics, and in the political elite, I would include top level political commentators as well as politicians, or to use another word, top level influences. So that's just an example of why I think that there is a problem about banding around the term "elite", unless you're using it as a general term to describe all the, as it were, the top people in the various different areas of life that you encounter, like top level professionals, top level, medical people, top level academics, top level industrialists. But then if you're doing that, you're all of a sudden, you're walking into a very, very, very disparate group of people.

1202 – very interesting on eliteness

**INTERVIEWER:** -[Missed] [01:13:09] maybe, you know, a marker of joining a British elite. How does that word elite land with you? Do you consider yourself part of the elite?

**PARTICIPANT:** I mean there is a great [Missed] [01:13:19] in terms of being in Who’s Who, because I’m in Who’s Who for one reason really, and that’s because my grandfather was made a baronet in 19 [Missed] [01:13:28] or whatever it was. And so my father was, then inherited when my grandfather died, and when my father died in 1996 I inherited it from him. And literally, literally on his deathbed, because he died as a result of an operation, not that it, you know, he was, he couldn’t be [Missed] [01:13:49]. So, and on his deathbed I remember when my mother went out from the hospital room my father said to me please accept the baronetcy that he’d got from his father. He said ‘you don’t have to use it, but’, he says, ‘don’t kick up about it. Don’t say no, because then it’ll be inherited after you die by your brother and he’s keen[?] [01:14:11] on it’. And it’s true. So I, you know, I said ‘yeah don’t worry you’re not going to die, and yes I will’, you know? And so you can’t now, you know, I’d never use it, and it’s quite interesting because somebody wrote to me the other day and said Sir Tom Shakespeare, and I hate that, absolutely hate it. And I said ‘please never call me that’, and I’ve never, ever used it, and I’m proud of that, that I’ve never, ever called myself that.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah.

**PARTICIPANT:** Because I don’t agree with inherited, you know, inherited titles. I think they’re daft, I think it’s wrong. I think it’s one thing giving somebody an honour for what they’ve achieved, and I have achieved a lot of things, but why would you give that to their son? It just seems, or daughter, most likely the son, I thought it was mad. So yeah, so, but yeah I look like a member of the elite. I went to private school, I went to Cambridge and I have a title and an honour. So you can’t get much more elite than that, but I don’t necessarily feel like a member of the elite, in my friends, in my career choices, in my lifestyle, it doesn’t feel like that. But, you know, who am I kidding? Maybe I am.

Shafik

**INT: But sort of, you know, do you consider yourself a member of the British elite? Does that you know, does that chime? If so, why? If not, why?**

RES: It doesn’t really chime for me. I mean that’s partly because I wasn’t sort of born into it.

**INT: Yes.**

RES: And I wasn’t, you know there are these people, it just makes me laugh. You know you go to these, look at these elite schools which are going to be studied.

**INT: Yes.**

RES: And they look just, and then they go to Oxbridge, and you look at the Oxford Union Debating Club and it’s like pre-prep for going into the House of Commons.

**INT: Yes.**

RES: And [unclear: 00:25:45] and then they go into the House of Commons and they go to their club.

**INT: Yes.**

RES: And then they go to the Lords and they, they spend their whole life in interiors that look exactly the same. It’s like one long conveyor belt that looks exactly the same. It’s bizarre.

David Johnston

RES: Until you added a bit to it, I was going to say I’m perfectly comfortable with the term elite, but not with elitist. So, there are elites in everything, there are sporting elites and so on and so on. I don’t like elitism. I think probably the thing to say, [s/l modern me, 00:53:43] I am now part of the British establishment and that feels uncomfortable. Yes, I don’t really-

**INT: Why?**

RES: Well, it’s certainly not how I think of myself. If you go back to a chip on the shoulder thing, I probably I saw in antagonism towards this. I suppose it leaves you feeling like you've lost a part of yourself. It’s that old thing about whether do you try and change institution from without or within. Once you go within though aren’t you all just all the same like the rest of them. So, I suppose that feels uncomfortable.