

The formation of religious *habitus* and confessional educational establishments in agreement with the State: issues and conflicts

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A formação do ‘habitus’ religioso e os estabelecimentos de ensino confessionais conveniados com o Estado: questões e conflitos

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Abstract

In this article we present a discussion about public schools and the formation of religious *habitus*. The research was carried out in three confessional school establishments, which establish an agreement between the religious order and the State. It operated with the Bourdieusian theory. Interviews were conducted and questionnaires were applied to five mothers, one father and 542 students. The results indicated that the families mobilize strategies for the maintenance and formation of their children’s religious habitus. In the schools investigated, the confessional characteristic proved to be the main motivating element for enrollment. We believe that the government should be the guardian of secular spaces and make efforts to make secularism effective, which is jeopardized in these establishments.

Keywords: public schools, religious habitus, secularism

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Resumo

Apresentamos neste artigo uma discussão sobre escolas públicas e formação do 'habitus' religioso. A pesquisa foi realizada em três estabelecimentos escolares confessionais, que estabelecem convênio entre ordem religiosa e Estado. Operou-se com a teoria bourdieusiana. Foram realizadas entrevistas e aplicados questionários com 5 mães, 1 pai e 542 estudantes. Os resultados sinalizaram que as famílias mobilizam estratégias para formar e manter o habitus religioso dos filhos. Nas escolas investigadas, a característica confessional se revelou como o principal elemento motivador para a realização das matrículas. Consideramos que o poder público deve ser guardião do espaço laico e envidar esforços na efetivação da laicidade, elemento que é colocado em risco nesses estabelecimentos.

Palavras-chave: *escolas públicas, habitus religioso, laicidade*

Introduction

We present in this article an excerpt of research carried out for the production of a doctoral thesis in Education. This thesis proposed a discussion on the formation of religious *habitus* through the combined actions between families and public educational institutions. This exercise enabled us to reflect on the principle of secularism and the relations developed between the State, the religious field, and the educational field. In this article, we aim to present some research results and discuss the issue of formation of religious *habitus* in public schools, based on the perceptions of parents and students of such institutions.

Our research problem is revealed through the understanding that, in the context of secular State, public educational institutions must constitute safe spaces for the expression of religious plurality (Fischmann, 2009). We understand that, by assuming a specific confessionality, public schools contribute toward their institutionally adopted religious dogmas being multiplied throughout the most diverse social spaces, because "... Education enables the adoption of *habitus*, which will then persist in the citizen" (Orlandi, 2007, p. 115, our translation). Thus, by favoring certain dogmas, schools fail to ensure that the different religious denominations occupy this space with equality.

The investigation was carried out in three public schools located in the city of Campo Grande (MS). The schools were chosen due to the relationship of these establishments with the

Catholic Church, which warrants these institutions being recognized as confessional. We contacted the State Department of Education (SED/MS) and⁴ were informed of the existence of four educational institutions that operate through established agreements between the State and the Catholic religious order. The invitation to participate in the research was extended to all institutions and accepted by three institutions.

We consider that these confessional institutions operating under agreement constitute a paradox in relation to studies on secularism. We sought to designate them as public confessional schools, since they operate in a building owned by a religious institution and under a rental contract, the State is able to occupy these spaces for school activities. In these educational institutions, school managers are appointed by the religious order, but the entire faculty and administrative technicians come from the state civil service. In addition, their curricular frameworks feature the Religious Education (RE) subject. We understand that such aspects are revealed as a strategy to prevent philosophical and methodological changes from interfering in school organization. Thus, we consider that the agents/students are situated in a favorable space for the constitution and maintenance of Catholic religious *habitus*.

What we affirm is based on the Pedagogical Political Projects (PPP) of the educational institutions. In these documents, we found the option for the Dom Bosco teaching methodology. We understand that, by opting for a teaching methodology based on Catholic religious principles, these institutions enable a space that favors the Catholic religion, since, by means of such choice, schools conduct their practices based on a logic of the Catholic religious field, which is reproduced and propagated in other social spaces through the actions of agents/students.

In the course of the research, we found no productions focused on investigating the formation of religious *habitus* in public school institutions operating under agreement⁵. Thus, we understand our work as a possibility to rethink practices adopted in the Brazilian educational context. Religious *habitus* is characterized by being the "... Principle that generates all thoughts, perceptions and actions, according to the norms of a religious representation" (Bourdieu, 2007a,

⁴According to Resolution/SED No. 3,012, of January 29, 2016, available on page 4 of Official Gazette No. 9,096, of February 1, 2016.

⁵This finding was based on a literature review carried out in the BDTD and SciELO databases (first half of 2018).

p. 57, our translation). Through the concept of religious *habitus*, Bourdieu demonstrates the influence of religious principles in the agents' identity formation.

Thus, with the adoption of religious *habitus*, the agents exhibit a disposition (tendency) toward practices that are guided by principles of a certain religious denomination. It is important to clarify that religious *habitus* is not understood as the only element influencing the choices and actions to be conducted by the agents. It is necessary to observe that its influence does not occur in isolation from other factors. Thus, the analyses reveal the intention of

... understanding how the programmatic provisions contained in the different religious denominations (and their local congregational tendencies) interact with the non-religious (or at least non-confessional) provisions current in society and, above all, how social subjects build their life trajectories based on this complex web of possibilities (Duarte, 2006, p. 52, our translation).

It is understood that, by valuing religious principles as elements that define rules and behaviors, religion is considered as one of the key elements for the establishment/recognition of the social order (Bourdieu, 2007a). Religious *habitus* enables agents to have the feeling of belonging to a certain religious order. Having this feeling of belonging, agents start to recognize and understand symbols, practices, thoughts, behaviors and rules that are characteristic of this group. The adoption of a religious *habitus* ends up "... Modifying on a lasting basis the representations and practices of the laity" (Bourdieu, 2007a, p. 57, our translation).

In the secular context, there is problematization of this type of position of public institutions, since some social issues start to be addressed considering a religiosity that is not always shared by all. In casting an investigative look into public educational spaces, we problematize their commitments to the principle of secularism.

The religious field is understood as a social space in which the elements of common interest between agents and institutions are the different religious denominations, their beliefs, practices, symbolisms, rules and manners of expression. In the religious field, "... Religion contributes to the imposition (concealed) of the principles of the structuring, perception and thought of the world" (Bourdieu, 2007a, p. 33, our translation). As in the other fields, we observe disputes within the religious field that reveal the interest in "... The monopoly of the management of salvation assets and of the legitimate exercise of religious power as a power to modify on a lasting basis the representations and practices of the laity" (Bourdieu, 2007a, p. 57, our translation).

In Brazil, a historical analysis of the relations between the State and the religious field reveals that, "... For approximately four centuries, the Catholic Church was in Portuguese America, then Brazil, as an official religious institution of the State" (Aquino, 2012, p. 57, our translation). This relation led to the consolidation of practices and customs related to the Christian faith, which were "naturally" incorporated into our culture. It is important to note that, in Brazil, the institution of secularism follows two paths, "... One proclaimed by the law and the other, that which is lived in the cultural and social sphere, where ambiguities and anachronisms persist, expressed in multiple ways" (Fischmann, 2009, p. 27, our translation).

In our country, religion is seen as "... The most important or perhaps the only source of morality in society" (Giumbelli; Carneiro, 2006, p. 173, our translation). Thus, we recognize that an analysis of the relationship between the State and the Church requires a careful examination, which understands the dynamic movements involved in the relations between such instances. It is important to clarify that the secular State is not one in which religion is absent, but one that enables the safe development of different religious confessions and practices, without having preference for some type of religious denomination.

We understand that the formation of religious *habitus* in public school spaces constitutes a practice that is against secular principles, since the State must have an impartial position in relation to religion. Although it is possible that the secular State provides the religious field with the possibility of conducting its practices and that it promotes the idea of respect for religious diversity, it is necessary that these actions are not confused with a state obligation to "teach" religion, something that appears, for example, in discussions regarding the presence of the RE subject in public schools, where a preference for the elements of Christian doctrine is observed (Cunha, 2007, 2016; Fischmann, 2006).

The observation of these spaces, as well as the analysis of their context, is significant for discussions on the issue of secularity in public school institutions (Cunha, 2009; Fischmann, 2012). The secular principle is understood as an element that guarantees respect for the most diverse religious denominations, which occupy public spaces. Thus, it is notorious the defense of public schools as plural spaces, which do not conduct practices that provide spaces of privilege for certain groups. We assume that families that choose these schools have an interest in the formation of their children's religious *habitus*, and that they see in these institutions the

possibility of ensuring that their children do not deviate from the “religious” path outlined by their parents.

The choice of educational establishment, understood as a strategy of parentocracy⁶, proves an element that allows the identification of family preferences and objectives in relation to the school trajectories of their children. When considering the school as a continuation of the family space, parents seek those that ensure the affinity of the *habitus*, which enables the child to recognize that “... one can or cannot ‘allow oneself’ implies a tacit acceptance of the position, a sense of limits” (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 141, our translation).

As methodology, we adopted interviews and questionnaires with five mothers and one father of students from local institutions that profess the Catholic faith. We call attention to something that is found in studies of relationships between family and school that shows a majority participation of mothers in research, while fathers continue as a rare element (Saraiva-Junges; Wagner, 2016). In addition, questionnaires were applied to 542 students from 6th grade to 9th grade classes of these institutions.

In our interviews, we sought to understand the view that mothers and fathers had of the school institutions chosen for the enrollment of their children. We aimed to determine whether there was interest in the formation or maintenance of religious *habitus* and whether confessionality was the element that aroused interest in the chosen institutions.

With regard to the spaces where our research was conducted, we observed the presence of Catholic religious *habitus*, which is shown not only by the connection with the Catholic religious order, but also by the practices in the school routine. In our research, we examined the families that profess the Catholic faith, despite observing in these spaces the presence of agents who adopt other religions, the option for Catholic families was due to the interest in understanding aspects of the Catholic religious field, which, as observed, has been losing its hegemony and seeing the need to develop new strategies for

⁶Parentocracy is defined as “... A legitimate means of selection, in which parents appear as those responsible for the school career of their children” (Antônio; Teodoro, 2011, p. 174, our translation). A movement in which parents are in charge of organizing investments and strategies so their children develop a successful school career.

... recovering the lost space or avoiding further loss.... These include the adoption of evangelical practices of great spectacles, the emphasis on charismatic preaching, the revalorization of miracles, the use of singing priests, TV networks and, finally, but not secondarily, the implementation of Religious Education in public schools (Cunha, 2013, p. 929, our translation).

We understand the institutions where we conducted our research as one of these strategies that can be observed in the pursuit of preserving Catholic hegemony. By choosing Catholic families, we aimed to determine how these strategies would be received. Observing these aspects enables determining the harmony of the field, which is necessary to guarantee its symbolic strength.

Family goals and the option for confessional schools under agreement: religious *habitus* as an element of interest

In this topic, the proposed discussions are organized based on the following problematizations: is enrollment in public confessional schools motivated by the confessionality of the institutions? What kind of family actions can be considered as favorable to the formation of the children's religious *habitus*? What conflicts can arise from the relationships established between families and the public confessional school? The topic will be organized through the presentation and discussion of the information produced through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with mothers and fathers of students of the institutions where we conducted the research.

Regarding the family strategies developed during the children's school trajectory, we found that "... regardless of the cultural context, parents tend to participate and get involved in the school in the most varied ways" (Saraiva-Junges; Wagner, 2016, p. 115, our translation). This involvement can appear in times of mobilization of economic, social and cultural resources. Bourdieu (2007b, 2011) observes that the social hierarchy and the possibility of investments in school education occurs by analysis of the volume and structure of different types of capital.

Thus, "... The choice of school means a first family movement in building the children's school trajectory" (Brandão, 2010, p. 12, our translation). Understanding family motivations is an exercise that proves a possibility to understand the different strategies adopted by families in pursuit of their children's school success. The educational establishment must, therefore, consist

with what is part of the project devised by parents, since “... Each family educating their children has as reference their beliefs, future perspectives and the way they understand the world and their experiences” (Franco, 2012, p. 212, our translation).

The family, by carrying out actions to inculcate the religious *habitus*, demonstrates the intention that their children establish and experience a relationship with the supernatural, resulting in the adoption of actions that reveal belonging to certain religious denominations. Therefore, confessional schools become an alternative for children to continue in contact with these practices and beliefs even outside the family milieu. A choice that discourages “... Socially discordant relations” (Bourdieu, 2007b, p. 228, our translation).

The six families that participated in our research can be classified as nuclear families consisting of father, mother and child(ren). Only in one of the cases, the paternal figure, having already died, was not among the family members. In addition to professing the Catholic religion and having children enrolled in public confessional institutions under agreement, the families were classified as belonging to the middle class, which in Brazil “... Do not constitute a homogeneous social universe” (Romanelli, 2010, p. 102, our translation).

This set of information was obtained by the application of a questionnaire, in which the participating mothers and father informed, among other elements, the religion professed by the family, monthly income, profession, number of residents in the household, etc. The questionnaire was aimed at approaching the families’ social and cultural reality. Using this instrument enabled us to determine that these families invest in the children’s school education at times of “purchase of didactic materials” and “enrollment in courses (languages, information technology),” options such as: “private teachers” and “exchange programs” were not mentioned by families. We found that the school market is⁷ not much explored by these families, which are limited to more traditional investments.

We understand that attending the most diverse social spaces can represent investment in education; thus, we could observe the conduct of “... Specific practices, aiming at the children’s school success” (Romanelli, 2010, p. 102, our translation). We sought to understand what kind of practices are carried out by the families. The options included attending “parks/squares,” “clubs,” “shopping malls,” “bookstores,” “museums,” “theater,” “concerts,”

⁷The term school market is used to refer to a market logic that permeates the relations established in the educational field (Ball, 1995).

and “church”; we found that the church was the space most frequently attended by these families, and only one of the participants indicated not attending church. Attending church is part of the range of strategies that favor the adoption of the Catholic religious *habitus*, which constitutes an element that reveals the family interest in the religious *habitus*. The other options with the highest number of responses were “squares/parks” and “bookstores,” revealing the stimulus to the reading habit, which directly contributes to the students’ good school performance.

Following our examination on the importance that the families give to religious aspects, they all chose to answer that religion is something “very important,” when asked about the opinion of their children in relation to religion, they said they consider there is a unity of thought in the family, since everyone pointed out they believe that their child “considers religion as something important”; the other options, “does not consider religion as something important, but attends church and has some religious habits due to the influence of the family and school,” “does not consider religion as something important and does not include religious practices in their habits,” which relativized the children’s relation with religion, were not indicated in any of the cases. The family is understood as a place of “... Accumulation, conservation, and reproduction” (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 177, our translation); in observing the relationship established by their parents with aspects of religiosity, children tend to develop similar behaviors, which are naturalized and adopted.

Regarding religious practices, all families reported that their children have been accustomed since childhood to pray and attend churches, five families indicated as a frequent practice since childhood to celebrate commemorative dates related to religion, and three also reported reading religious books or texts and being in contact with religious symbols. We found a contradiction in this case, since all of them indicated their children have attended churches since childhood, it would imply they were also in contact with religious symbols since childhood, because a Catholic church would hardly lack symbols referring to religion in its interior — for example, figures of Catholic saints.

As for this aspect, we consider that the naturalization of these symbols can lead to this lack of attention of parents when responding about their children’s contact with religious symbols since childhood, since they start to consider the symbols as common aspects, intrinsic to the places, and not necessarily religious. It is understood that “... The representations of the

world, of man, of society that the Christian ideology advocates are rooted in individuals, so deeply, that they cannot deviate from these values” (Rocha, 2016, p. 244, our translation). Accordingly, there is a detachment of the symbol from its meaning.

There is a tendency on the part of families to agree with the premise that religion contributes to the ethical development of individuals, and that “... Moral conduct would occur through the feeling of sacred... it would consist in obeying the commandments of a superior, feared and desired” (Lima, 2008, p. 28, our translation). Regarding this aspect, three families answered that religion is fundamental for the ethical development of their child, and the other three chose the statement “it is important for the ethical development of their child, but it is not the only way to ensure this development.” None of the families considers religion as something that “has no influence on the ethical development of their child.” According to the families, religiosity in the school setting contributes to: “improve the quality of education,” “improve the behavior of students,” “improve the relationships developed between teachers and students,” “improve the behavior of students.” None of the parents indicated that the presence of religiosity provides no contributions to the school setting.

As for the school’s responsibility as an institution that promotes the children’s religious development, none considered it to be a responsibility only of the family, showing that they agree with the notion that family and school should share this task (Lima, 2008). Of these, five considered that “yes, but all religions must be addressed” and one stated that “yes, provided that it is in accordance with the teachings of the religion adopted by my family”; in this case, we observed the concern with preserving the religious values adopted by the family. This situation reveals the belief that there are universal religious values to be transmitted to society as a whole, which proves an erroneous thought when considering the religious plurality that constitutes the cultural and social framework of Brazilian society.

The answers obtained with the questionnaires enabled observing an acceptance of families in relation to religious practices within school spaces. In addition, they indicated the family mobilization that aims to develop and value the religious *habitus*, showing that these are families in which religion consists in an aspect of great relevance, which is present in the practices and relationships established in the family milieu.

The second data collection instrument applied to the family consisted of interviews. We clarify that, in order to preserve the participants’ identities, we will use fictitious names. As

previously mentioned, we had the participation of five mothers (Isabela, Julia, Rosana, Paula and Sofia) and one father (Carlos)⁸. It was established with the participants that the recording of the audio would take place at a time and place of their preference. Isabela and Julia chose to receive us in their own homes, which made it possible to observe some aspects.

When we arrived at Isabela's house, we observed on TV the broadcast of shows from a Catholic TV channel; in addition, religious symbols were present in the setting, the same was observed in Julia's residence. We considered these practices as means to inform and reinforce their belief in an interview situation, that is, a reaffirmation of faith, which is revealed in the practices incorporated by the religious *habitus*. The other interviews were conducted at the participants' workplaces.

Based on the parents' accounts regarding their children's school history, we observed that before attending the public confessional institutions where we conducted our research, some of these families already demonstrated a preference for confessional schools. Isabela, Rosana and Paula describe similar situations, where moving to other cities caused family concerns, as living in a larger city could jeopardize the values adopted by the families. Paula says that the option for a private confessional school in the early years of her child's school education was the way found to ensure that they did not lose the education received at home.

The same happened to Isabela, who opted for a private confessional school with evangelical features. According to Isabela, the difference between the confessionality of the school and the faith professed by the family caused conflicts. The respondent recalled a specific situation, where the principal compelled her daughter to stop wearing a crucifix around her neck. The mother reported not remembering any conflicting situations occurring after her daughter started to attend the confessional institution under agreement with the State; we observed that the similarity between the family religiosity and the religious confession adopted by the educational institution contribute to more harmonious relationships for families. Sofia also revealed the option for confessional institutions even before the daughters reached the age

⁸Isabela, a beautician: indicated monthly family income of 5 to 15 minimum wages; Julia, unemployed: indicated monthly family income of 2 to 5 minimum wages; Rosana, teacher: indicated monthly income of 2 to 5 minimum wages; Paula, a public servant: indicated monthly family income of 2 to 5 minimum wages; Sofia, a biller: indicated monthly income of 2 to 5 minimum wages; Carlos, a military police officer: indicated monthly family income of 5 to 15 minimum wages.

required for enrollment. The families' choice for confessional institutions is associated with a concept of preserving the values taught to their children.

In the cases of Rosana, Carlos and Júlia, we found no option to enroll their children in confessional institutions in other periods of the children's school history. In the last three cases, the issue of location was the first aspect observed when choosing educational institutions. We observed that, in the case of Rosana, the option for the confessional school under agreement stemmed from the mobilization of her social capital, since the choice was based on being acquainted with other people who had already studied at the institution, who, according to her, "... *Graduated from college, today they are all employed, so that means that we have reference of the school*" (Rosana, 2020). We found in this case a family interest in the long-term school career of their children, since the mother makes a projection of what can happen based on the experience of other agents.

Julia and Carlos pointed out as an element of influence on their choice, in the first place, the issue of location. Carlos said that the option for the confessional school under agreement was due to "... *It also being a school that has a relationship with my religion*" (Carlos, 2020). In the case of Julia, social capital also influenced her decision about the school, because when she moved to the neighborhood where she lives, she heard positive reports about the institution. According to Julia, the good image of the school was related to the care of the religious order that owns the school building. Despite that, when asked about the confessional characteristic of the school having been something that influenced her choice, she indicated that "... *It was recommended as a great school, with great teachers and because of the organization, not because it was confessional*" (Júlia, 2020).

We observed a contradiction in Julia's account, which can be justified by a misunderstanding of the concept of confessional school. The mother did not establish a relation between the way the school is organized and the religious assumptions that govern the school rules and conduct. When analyzing her report, we found that for her the religious institution is distant from the school routine, being an element that exerts care, but not an influence on the practices and actions.

For the other cases, confessionality was pointed out as a relevant characteristic for the choices. Sofia says that the affinity with the institution was due to the confessional characteristic of the institution, as it is "... *within the same thoughts of religion*" (Sofia, 2020). According to Paula, confessionality awakens in students a tendency to develop a discipline necessary not only for

the school career, but also for the later stages of life. Rosana also establishes a relation between confessionality and development for life in society, which is an important characteristic for the educational institution. As for Carlos' understanding, religion should be part of children's education so as to cover all social spaces in which they participate, and

... We believe that today the education of a child is already very difficult, with the church it is very difficult, imagine without it, you know?... we believe that it is important for her intellectual development, as human being (Carlos, 2020).

Isabela says that the choice for the confessional institution is part of the family habit of constantly seeking to be close to "... *things of God*" (Isabela, 2020). She adds an acceptance of the children about the choice for the confessional institution, something that is justified by the religious *habitus* already adopted by the children who, according to her, present a different behavior from other children of the same age. She says that "... *They don't listen to radio or songs that, like, have bad words, these types of songs, but not because I imposed it on them or their father did, but because they know that it's not of God*" (Isabela, 2020).

Although the children had never had contact with a confessional school, Rosana says that she perceived her children's acceptance of the confessional school, such characteristic pleased the students, being understood as something positive. According to Carlos, despite not having had a conversation with his daughter on the confessional characteristic of the institution before enrolling her, there was no type of complaint, and he reports having noticed an improvement in his daughter's behavior after entering the institution, something that he attributes to the development of religious practices.

Sofia informed that her daughters were already aware of the confessionality of the school, and that this was never a factor that caused discomfort. Julia revealed an immediate acceptance of her son: "... *I believe he has nothing against it because he is a Catholic, right, he had first communion, he was raised within religion, so there is no problem*" (Julia, 2020). In Paula's case, there was a resistance on the part of her son, who was opposed to the family decision:

... In the first two months, he met the teachers, he felt some teachers were a little severe, but in the second semester he said: "Mom, this is where I want to stay. I learned a lot more here than in a private school, today I am another person." So I had his account that it was good for him, not just my observation (Paula, 2020).

In general, we found in the families a behavior that expects consensus of the children regarding their decisions, and they do not seem to feel the need to establish a dialogue so the issue of confessionality is explained, since it is already rooted into the family practices that form the *habitus*. In Paula's case, the mother states that her son overcame the feelings of resistance presented at the beginning of his experience at the institution, as the student understood the importance of the rules established by the institution. Isabela associates the students' well-being with the presence of religious symbols inside the schools, because

... The moment you look at a painting, or something that reminds you of a good thing, because I doubt anyone will look at the image of Jesus or Mary and remember a bad thing. Even if a person is from another religion, they will look at it and it will convey, they know that it is of God, even if it is not from their religion, the person will look and say: "it is of God," just for that it already conveys something to you (Isabela, 2020).

We found in Isabela's account this association between religious symbols and well-being, a characteristic associated with the remnants of a school tradition that attributes to the elements of the religious field a certain "... Ideological force having influence on the social environment" (Rocha, 2016, p. 240, our translation). Thus, symbols are assigned the functions of reassuring and inculcating behaviors in students that demonstrate respect for the established order.

Unlike Paula and Isabela, Sofia does not consider that religious symbols exert any kind of influence on students' behavior. However, according to her, the meaning of the symbols refers to love, charity and respect for others, hence the importance of their presence. Sofia understands that the Catholic symbols present in the institution do not influence the behavior of students who do not profess the Catholic faith.

Rosana observed a behavior of acceptance of the presence of religious symbols not only of the children, but also of non-Catholic students, being possible to see "... The respect they have, they do not move them, they do not make... as they say, pranks or make any joke under any circumstances. They respect the symbol" (Rosana, 2020). According to Carlos, accepting the presence of religious symbols is something beneficial, because "... It is a way of, in my environment in the case of my daughter in my family, which is a Catholic family, you know, of instilling in her these practices and the culture of our religion" (Carlos, 2020).

Julia made an exclusive analysis of her son, not mentioning the other students, and believes that the symbols present in the institution do not affect his behavior because "... These

symbols, he is used to having them here at home. My mother has an altar, even wears scapulary, these little things related to religion. So it does not affect him” (Julia, 2020). We consider that, by saying that the symbols do not affect the child’s behavior, Julia reveals the continuation of family actions in the school institution, in this case, something that could cause strangeness would be the absence of the symbols.

According to these families, the religious symbols present in the public confessional institutions do not affect the behavior of the children because it is something that is part of the family life of the students. The presence of religious symbols in schools is naturalized, which reinforces the notion that the Catholic religion has principles that can be considered universal; therefore, there is no problem that symbols occupy public spaces, disregarding that

... The material aspects of educational establishments are an important factor in the constitution of certain practices that can constrain or stimulate the dissemination of certain knowledge (Branco, 2016, p. 352, our translation).

This can result in silencing actions in relation to groups professing other beliefs, which, even being a minority, have the same rights as to the public space. Also in relation to the institutions’ confessionality, we found that parents attribute to this characteristic the possibility of distinguishing them from other public schools, as “... *because it is under the care of nuns, some things will not be admitted, not every type of material will be given to students, which are not in accordance with our rules?*” (Isabela, 2020). Carlos, who is a military police officer, also points to confessionality as a guarantee of security for the school setting

... *I know some public schools, mainly state schools, and we have noticed several problems, mainly related to the use and consumption of narcotics, some kind of violence, bullying. And, there, I honestly did not notice any case... in some schools there are situations of violence, students fighting, these things, and we have seen no such thing there* (Carlos, 2020).

According to Rosana, confessionality is a differential that is determinant for the choices of families, who choose these institutions, a vision shared with Sofia. Paula describes that the school rules give the institution the distinction. The parents inform that the institutions have the habit of holding meetings before the beginning of the school period in which the rules are discussed, at which time, for them, families have the possibility to reflect on the choice and decide whether they will keep their children in the institution. Thus, those who do not conform to what is established can opt out

... And if there is a parent who is even of another religion, because it is mixed there, it is a public school (sic), she makes it clear that it is under the care of nuns and there will be things like that, of the church. And I know people, like, including one who is a friend of mine, who is extremely enthusiastic about having her daughter admitted there and she is evangelical, precisely because of the rules that are stricter (Isabela, 2020).

They also report, in addition to the presence of religious symbols, school practices followed by the custom of prayers, such as, for example, the moment of reception before the beginning of classes, and all these issues are informed in this meeting that precedes the beginning of the school period. Regarding the possibility of enrolling children in institutions if they do not follow the same confessionality professed by the family, Carlos, Rosana and Paula signal an acceptance of this possibility; according to them, the important aspect is the presence of religious principles, regardless of the religious denomination that governs the setting.

Paula, however, makes clear her preference for confessional schools of Christian denominations.

Regardless of the religion, because I have no prejudice to any and I think that, wherever God is, regardless of the house He is in, for me He will always be God... I think the doctrine changes in some houses, but the father will always be the same (Paula, 2020).

Julia and Sophia clearly explained their restrictions on enrollment in institutions of confessionality other than Catholic. Sofia states that she would not enroll her daughters in an institution of confessionality different from the Christian one: “... if it were in another one, no, because I think that education starts from home, so it is no use just relying on the school, I also have to pursue it” (Sofia, 2020). The respondents show a concern with the preservation of the religious *habitus* already inculcated. Julia says that “... If it were a school that imposed it, no, it is a school, for example, Adventist and the student has to be Adventist, then no, certainly not” (Julia, 2020).

In relation to the roles to be played by each institution in the children’s religious education, the parents understand that the work of the school and the family are complementary, and the family is understood as the one that should give the first example, being “... educator and evangelizer as well, and encouraging. And transmit the practice, the habit, through examples you take your child to this path” (Carlos, 2020). Parents attribute to schools the role of informing their children about religious diversity, but on the other hand they indicate a preference for their children to remain professing the Catholic faith.

Sofia defines the Religious Education subject as the school tool for the promotion of religious development, and considers it important that her daughter participates in the classes of the subject because she believes that at this time the teachings present in her family and in the church they attend are transmitted. Julia understands the subject as the possibility that her son has to know the other religions, to “... *find out what is good and what is not good for him*” (Júlia, 2020). Paula attributes to RE the role of teaching students moral values, and Carlos considers RE as “... *an instrument that we have to be disseminating Christian thought*” (Carlos, 2020). Isabela shows agreement with the other parents, because she considers that in RE “... *you gradually mold the child within values, and good values. Because every religion has its good foundation*” (Isabela, 2020).

We recognize in these families cases that reveal the internalization of the Catholic religious *habitus*, a naturalization of practices that disregards the presence of religious diversity in public schools. Their diagnosis about the schools is focused on their own children, disregarding the presence of that which is “different” for them. However, their accounts contribute to the determination of public confessional institutions as a space of privilege for certain religions, especially Catholicism.

Confessionality proved a characteristic that attracted parents to these educational establishments, and in some cases social capital led parents to seek them, showing that these institutions achieve the objective of disseminating a good social image. There is a harmonious combination between family and school that enables a mutual acceptance of the choices made in relation to the mode of education that should be provided, avoiding conflicts and problematizations. The families seem to be sure that their children and the other students of the institutions are in agreement with the school organization, and do not consider the presence of conflicts in these schools as a possible reality.

Students from confessional schools under agreement and their perceptions of the confessionality of the educational institutions under research

In this topic, we analyzed questionnaires answered by students from participating institutions. Our analysis *corpus* included the participation of 542 students from 6th to 9th grades of Elementary School. It was a questionnaire containing nine questions, in which students could mark one or more than one answer option, depending on the question. We left open the possibility that they would include new response options if deemed necessary. Our intention was to make an approximation with the school reality experienced by this group, as well as to identify evidence of the way the relationship between parents and children is established and developed in the moments of decisions about school trajectories. We also aimed to understand whether students' motivations to remain in these institutions were aligned with parental desires.

Initially, we sought to determine whether the students knew the reasons that led their families to choose the institutions in which they are enrolled. Faced with the question “do you know the motivations that led your family to choose this school?,” 72.04% of the students indicated knowing such motivations, while 27.96% said they did not know. We understand that the fact of knowing or not knowing the reasons that lead their parents to choose the educational institution reveals the conduct of dialogues between parents and children about the school trajectories and the objectives set for it. A movement that may indicate that parents act to include their children in decisions about their school life. As, when it comes to parentocracy strategies, there is “... The need to consider the student's role as an active part of their own path” (Zago, 2010, p. 21, our translation). In order for these strategies to achieve their intended objectives, parents and children must demonstrate to be in tune.

In order to be able to observe this possibility, we asked the students if their opinion was considered before enrollment. We observed a situation that enables us to say that the assumption raised about the conduct of dialogues between parents and children about the school trajectory is confirmed, because 60.34% of the students said they had their opinion heard by the parents, and 39.66% said they had not been heard. As for the reasons indicated by the students as elements influencing their parents' decision, we found the following categories: confessionality/religiosity, school discipline, influence of social capital, and quality of education.

On each of the aspects, we present some answers left literally by the students in the questionnaires.

- a) Confessionality/religiosity: *“Because the school is good and religious”; “Rigid rules, good quality of education and proximity to religion”; “For being a Catholic school and being rigid”; “Because it is of nuns”; “Because it is my religion, for being good and strict”; “Its good education and religion among other activities such as the celebration for Our Lady Help of Christians”; “For having RE classes”; “For being a good school and for the fact that my mother did not accept the fact that I am an atheist. She thought a religious school would help me find myself.”*
- b) Discipline: *“They think this school is very good in the matter of being very strict and my parents think that the more rigid it will be better”; “Because it is good here and hard and my mother likes hard schools”; “Because of the education and the ‘fame’ of the school being rigid”; “Because it is rigid, having a good education, not having a bad individuals in it”; “Stricter study method, a school that everyone praises”; “The studies, the principal and the rigid teachers”; “Good teachers, rules and discipline”; “Because I was lazy then they sent me to this school to help me be more attentive”; “My mother said that education here was better and that it would also bring me discipline”;*
- c) Influence of social capital: *“Good teaching and good recommendations”; “Because my cousin studied here”; “My family’s partners said that this school was very good, so it was recommended by them”; “Because everyone spoke very well of this school”; “Because my cousin has already studied in this school”; “Indication of several people in my family for having a great education” “Because my mother studied here and she likes the education of this school”; “Because the teaching is very good and because family members said that here in this school there are opportunities that other schools lack.”*
- d) Education quality: *“They think it is a good, organized, quiet school, different from other public schools”; “Because the number of students who are approved in the Enem exam here is high and also because it is a great school”; “The school has good teachers and is a great school because it is always among the best”; “Because it is one of the best schools because it has quality teachers”; “Because it was the school with the most students approved in university entrance exams and quite hard competition for admission and because it is a benchmark school”; “it has good education, it is very demanding, and it is one with the most competition for admission in the state”; “The school has a good quality of education”; “The education here is great, including the teachers, and in my other school the education was very weak so I learned almost nothing, and here I learned a lot”;*

“Education is excellent and welcoming”; “It is a good school that my parents can trust”; “For me to be someone in life, to graduate from college.”

Based on the students’ answers, we observed a consensus with the considerations presented by the parents participating in the research. In general, the school’s public consists of students from families that tend to prefer school education that provides moments with religious aspects. Being that:

... Confessional education, promoted by a confessional educational institution, provides that the whole of the school – starting with its educational project – is guided by the values of religious tradition and religious charism professed by the institution (Borba, 2014, p. 24, our translation).

In some cases, these educational institutions are understood as a possibility to correct behaviors considered inappropriate by parents, as in the case of the student who reported that his mother chose the school because she disagreed with his choice of being an atheist. Contact with religious practice would be the alternative found by this mother for her son to modify his way of thinking, the adoption of a religious *habitus* would result from the experience of religious practices conducted in the school setting through the “... Appropriation (material and/or symbolic) of a certain category of objects or practices” (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 83, our translation).

In order to trace interests among parents and students about aspects that motivate their stay in the institutions, we questioned what would be the elements that contribute so they remain studying in the institutions. The options provided were: (i) The school has a good quality of education; (ii) I have good teachers; (iii) The direction and pedagogical coordination have a good relationship with teachers, students and the entire school community; (iv) The school is close to my home, or to my parents’ workplace; (v) I feel good studying in a space that provides a proximity to issues of religiosity; (vi) The school allows moments of discussions about religious practices and principles that I consider important for my development in general; (vii) The school offers extracurricular activities that are of interest to me.

The most indicated option was “the school has a good quality of education,” chosen by 29.85% of students. Followed by “I have good teachers,” an option checked by 20.88%. The third most indicated characteristic was “the school is close to my home, or my parents’ workplace,” which had 15.55% of the answers. A total of 12.3% of the students indicated as motivation to remain in the institutions “the direction and pedagogical coordination develop a

good relationship with teachers, students and the entire school community.” The option “I feel good about studying in a space that provides proximity to questions of religiosity” was indicated by 8.74% of students, with the sixth most indicated reason being the alternative “the school offers extracurricular activities that are of interest to me,” which had 7.97% of the answers, and finally, with 4.72%, the option “the school allows moments of discussions about religious practices and principles that I consider important for my development in general.”

Based on the answers indicated in the questionnaires answered by the students, it is possible to affirm that their interests in relation to the educational institutions in which they are enrolled are not related to the issue of confessionality. The alternatives that referred to this characteristic were less indicated.

Regarding the option “the school allows moments of discussions on religious practices and principles that I consider important for my development in general” having occupied the last position, we raised two hypotheses: the first considers a context in which the institutions do not have moments of discussions on religious practices and principles, which we consider less likely, since in addition to the practices reported by the parents, we recall the presence of the RE subject in the curricula, which aims, precisely, to be a time when religion is the subject of discussion in class, and the students corroborate this assumption, since 62.18% affirmed to identify religious expression in the RE subject.

Another assumption considered that, according to the students, discussions about religious practices and principles are not important for their educational development in general. This was demonstrated by an opinion completely contrary to that presented by the group of parents interviewed. If, according to the families, religion constitutes an element that contributes to the development for life in society, students do not seem to agree. They support a school education that is based on the principles of a secular ethics, which undertakes to “... discern between national values under construction, between those that have cultural origin and those that have religious origin (in one or other faith)” (Fischmann, 2006, p. 230, our translation). An ethics that does not act toward imposing cultural arbitrariness, contributing to an organization that hierarchizes religious denominations, their values and beliefs.

Bourdieu (2011) defines the cultural arbitrary as a movement of imposition of cultural and social practices. This creates the notion that there are cultures of lower “... value in an economic or symbolic market” (Bourdieu, 2011, p. 51, our translation), which must be

overcome and adjusted to what is considered to be the best or most correct. The school contributes to the perpetuation of the cultural arbitrary (Bourdieu, 2011). Thus, by favoring religious principles of a given religion, it contributes to the strengthening of certain religious groups, reaffirming their social power.

Some aspects can also be highlighted, as observed in some questionnaires regarding students' negative opinions about educational institutions. Although there have been few, we present here as a way to indicate dissatisfaction with the school setting, namely: *“None, I will change schools next year, hopefully”*; *“I am obliged”*; *“I do not want to study here, but my enrollment fell into this school and I do not feel like staying here”*; *“I do not like it, my last year. The school was once good”*; *“It’s my last year and I was not allowed to change”*; *“No, the school may be of quality, but it is extremely boring and irritating to the extreme, very much so”*; *“I had no interest in coming to this school, but my parents did.”* We clarify that despite expressing dissatisfaction, they did not present a justification, which makes it impossible for us to affirm that it is due to the characteristic of confessionality.

In general, we consider that the students showed to be aware that confessionality is an important factor for their parents to decide to enroll them in the confessional institutions under agreement. However, the group of students' interest in these schools is unrelated to the issues involving religion/religiosity; the parents attribute the motivation to confessionality, whereas for the students this factor was of little importance in their choice. It seems to us there is a conflict of interest, which can lead the students to dissatisfaction with the school setting, causing unsatisfactory school performance.

Final considerations

The presence of religiosity in the public school space constitutes an unresolved problem for the schools in our research, which we call public confessional schools. The adoption of the principle of secularism leads to the understanding that religion is an aspect to be solved in the private sphere, which means stating that, despite having the duty to guarantee religious expression in a safe manner, the State must not to promote religious education.

Historically, the Catholic religious field has developed an approximation with the Brazilian political field, which contributes to the acceptance and naturalization of practices in public educational establishments. Thus, we observe a legitimation of religious principles as

elements determining the practices adopted in the educational field in which the school operates, in order to modify practices and inculcate a religious *habitus* (Bourdieu, 2007a).

The institutions in our research indicate a context in which parents and students show different interests about their school trajectories. While parents prefer confessional spaces because they understand religion as a necessary aspect for the development of their children for life in society, students seem to give little importance to religious aspects. The families consider religion as a fundamental aspect to ensure that their children adopt moral and ethical principles, and consider educational institutions as proper spaces for religious education, which should occur concomitantly with family actions.

The families naturalize religious practices, which is consistent with the acceptance of the notion that religion is responsible for maintaining the school order, influencing the way relations develop, identifying a "... need for 'moralization' and 'systematization' of beliefs and practices" (Bourdieu, 2007a, p. 34, our translation). The Catholic religious *habitus* shared by schools and families contributes to the development of a harmonious relationship, in which the established order is not questioned, with this premise being a desired element and considered as a positive aspect, disregarding the presence of religious diversity, which is silenced in favor of the Christian perspective, especially the Catholic perspective.

The confessional institutions under agreement in the study constitute spaces where the Catholic religion occupies a place of privilege that directly contributes "... to the 'legitimization' of the power of the 'dominant' and to the 'domestication of the dominated'" (Bourdieu, 2007a, p. 32, our translation). This privilege is revealed in actions and practices such as, for example, the process of choosing the school direction, the presence of the RE subject in curricula, the adoption of the Dom Bosco teaching methodology, the presence of Catholic religious symbols within the institutions, among others reported by families and students

These practices indicate strategies of the Catholic field seeking to maintain an order, in which Catholicism is expressed hegemonically. Although the presence of agents/students professing other religious denominations is not prevented in these spaces, religious plurality is disregarded by opting for a school organization in which Catholic logic governs the setting.

We found a conflict with the principle of secularism arising from the establishment of this type of agreement. There is a risk that this type of practice will cause a silencing of certain religious groups that constitute a minority in public school spaces, exposing them to the most

diverse situations in which a cultural arbitrary is legitimized, providing conditions that foster symbolic violence actions motivated by religious intolerance.

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