Making the "best" of private education:
building ties and meanings in an elite Portuguese school

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Abstract

This paper departs from sociology of education to document and theorize the social, cultural and political dimensions of the education of young adults from the economic elite in a private school that was created, in reaction to mass schooling and as a way to ensure elites the distinction formerly provided by public education. The paper brings to the fore the contexts and consequences associated with the rise of privatization. On the basis of an ethnographic incursion for more than ten years in that private school in Northern Portugal complemented by focus group discussion with young adults in upper secondary education, the paper highlights the ways in which this group of the economic elites builds their social ties and constructs meanings within the school. Private schooling shapes and reinforces the status of the economic elites. However, tensions between inequality and privilege may arise within this process. We argue that if there is an individual action in the interpretation and construction of social reality, this school, has particular impact on the students as members of the global elite. By means of this educational context, which many times reinforces the expectations of status and upper mobility of the families, through education, these students are seduced by (the power of) consumption and most of them are willing to take part in the national and international labor markets and competition.

Keywords

Elite education – Privatization – Labor markets – International competition.

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Introduction

Departing from sociology of education this paper tries to document and theorize the social, cultural and political dimensions surrounding a specific group of the young economic elite in Northern Portugal as well as the contexts associated with their rise in education. Significant number of international and national research has addressed the question of social inequality and the role of education in its reproduction. The work of Bourdieu on the elites (1996) may be referred as a milestone in this field, bringing new meanings and concerns to the academic production of members of the Frankfurt School such as Habermas and Freire who unveiled the role of education tout courts in the reproduction of social inequalities. Even though there has been growing interest in this area particularly in more recent years not so much has been said about elite education and its role in social reproduction. Current analysis (DALOZ, 2010; BALL, 2015) are to be emphasized owing to their contribution to the field especially in what concerns the reanalysis of "distinction" (BOURDIEU, 1979) and excellence. The critic produced by Howard and Kenway (2015) about the studies on the elites and the elite education is also to be highlighted as it brings together the most burning issues in this matter. Contrary to the approaches centered on the goodness of elite private schools, which risk generalization and homogenization and hide the struggles of the young generation in finding and asserting their own voice, our analysis does not join the belief of a "social paradise" (BOURDIEU, 1996; KENWAY; KOH, 2013) where full mutual recognition boosts and confirms individual values within the values of the group. However, this discussion does not fit in the scope of this article that focuses the ways in which the private education of the young elites can foster their social ties within and beyond school.

With these objectives the article starts by reflecting on the political dimensions of the rise of the economic elite in education tainted by global forces of neoliberalism, marketization, and commodification. The second section explores the educational contexts associated with the rise of the economic elites in education placing it within the debate for and against the privatization of education. The following section, which addresses the contexts and methods of empirical data collection justifies the choice of this particular school to develop the analysis bringing to the fore the specificities of its ethos and the characteristics of the school population that was consulted. Building social ties within school is the last section that describes the ways in which the school leads the construction of social ties among its members, young adults in particular, by means of celebrations, the use of uniforms, and the relation with the school families and the induction of new teachers in the school culture.

The political dimensions of the rise of the economic elite in education

Until recently, in Portugal prevailed a centralized educational regime that is tainted by global forces of neoliberalism, marketization, and commodification. The demand

for elite private education has ascended and the politics associated with class, elitism, hierarchies and inequalities have intensified.

Launched in the mid-1980s, when the country joined the EEC (currently EU), the school where the study was developed gives prominence to internationalization and offers innovative, cooperative hands on learning, in order to promote students' independence, autonomy and leadership skills such as group management, public speaking and decision-making. These competences are seen as essential for students' future insertion in the international labor market to which they are being prepared by their school experience. Even if competitive politics of performativity, individualism and consumerism shape the lives of the students within school as a model that will prove to be useful in the future adult world of global market competitiveness, the emphasis on student performance does not make the mistake to neglect the processes of the construction of knowledge, which the school invests and permanently updates.

The school where the study was developed emerged within the trend of privatization, liberalization and modernization which gave room to high differentiation and specialization (AFONSO, 2013), together with political, social and economic pressures on education, high competitiveness and the vigilance over school life (NÓVOA, 2005). Parental free school choice became an instrument and expression of the commodification of the educational services (BALL, 2003; ARNOT, 2009). "Rigor", "rationality" and the adoption of managerial models to education have shaped the educational policies (STOER, 2001), allegedly to increase the quality of education with a view to efficiency and effectiveness.

The privatization of education that allows the transference of educational responsibilities from the government to private entities (CARNEIRO, 2006) has supported both educational elitism – shaped by the private educational provision for only a few selected ones, and educational and social segregation (CORTESÃO, 1998) – of most individuals of the population that do not have the economic resources to pay for the high school fees. Emphasizing the tension between liberalization and marketization new educational markets emerged that provide differentiated educational options and assure the elite the distinction (BOURDIEU, 1979) that was put at risk by the democratization of the access to public education, particularly in the last forty-five years. The attractiveness for the economy of the global educational market (KENWAY; FAHEY; KOH, 2013; KENWAY; FAHEY, 2014) where the performative focus is emphasized and explored (BALL, 2006) may also be at the roots of the development of this school that is shown by the strong increase on the number of students. The school globalized practices seem to respond to the needs of the national elite and the school benefits from the global mobility of high profile professionals leading management and other top careers.

In confirmation with the approaches that criticize the excessive link between education and the labor market (STOER; MAGALHÃES, 2009), Afonso (2009) locates the existence in Portugal of educational policies related to evaluation that induce the expansion of the education market as result of the comparison in equal terms between public and private schools, possibly leading to distinct parental choice of the school. Effects of *quasi-market* may also emerge from the differentiated comparison and choice

between public schools, small, medium and large, rural and urban, privileged and underprivileged, in a tension between parental choice and state regulation. Due to its focus on accounting, measurement and comparison, the risks of evaluating schools on the basis of tests and school rankings are also brought to the fore, as they allow emphasizing the incommensurability and incomparability of many of the dimensions that constitute the educational process, the "complexity and plurality of goals, missions and functions of school education" (AFONSO, 2009, p. 13).

As criticized by the author, the system of accountability in Portugal is centered on the evaluation of teachers' performance, institutional evaluation of schools, national exams and publication of school rankings. However, accountability must be sustained on "essential values such as justice, transparency, the right to information, participation and citizenship that must be rethought in the scope of new critical and creative thinking about other possible and desirable conceptions of democracy in the present" (AFONSO, 2009, p. 13). In a promising and innovative fashion, Afonso induces reflection on the transformative potential of rethinking these policies, in line with a movement of transformation (RADAELLI, 2003) in the political deep construction, in which the notion of accountability incorporates evaluation, accountability and responsibility. This means, a broader, deeply rooted and complex notion, "in theoretical and methodological, political, epistemological and axiological terms" (AFONSO, 2009, p. 16). If accountability cannot be reduced to a "ritualistic or symbolic" dimension either should it be associated with instrumental, hierarchical and bureaucratic, managerial or controlling perspectives that are recurrent in political discourses and practices.

In the same line of thought, Cortesão et al. (2007) also emphasize the lessening and segregating characteristics of the policies merely focused on students' marks on national examinations, which result in out of context "evaluation" of the learning-teaching process in that it does not take into account the multiplicity of causes associated with the production of results. These policies do not take in consideration that educational institutions are influenced and constrained by macro-structural frameworks of the society to which they belong and in which they operate. Either do they acknowledge that particular cultural forms and relational dynamics are constructed within these institutions under the influence of economic interests that bind to increasing educational *quasi-market*.

The increasing separation between public and elite private education comes as result of the growth of governmental implementation of parental free-choice. This can lead to contestation by those who defend public school and equal access and success in educational as it stimulates unequal competition between public and elite private schools, while concurrently widening the gap between schools and throwing suspicion on the work of some institutions and their teachers, without giving room for the analysis of the variables that must be taken into account, such as students social and cultural origins (PEREIRA, 2007). The option for elite education may only be made by a small group of the population – the economic elites.

Educational contexts associated with the rise of the economic elites in education

It is worth mentioning that the Portuguese education system includes a whole set of schools: mass public schools run by the state; state funded private schools to assure education for the populations in disadvantaged situations such as low socioeconomic status; and very selective elite schools that charge high fees and may – or not – be sponsored by the state either directly through financial resources or indirectly by the rare provision of scholarships to students. This means that educational privatization refers to a wide spectrum of provision from the most deprived to the most privileged groups. It may be run by religious groups, private businesses, and centers of solidarity or parents.

In Portugal, elite education has gained floor within the debate for and against private education; a debate that prevailed under the recent context of economic, social, political and cultural crisis, in which job scarcity, unemployment, and the general impoverishment of the population have led middle class students whose life conditions have also deteriorated to leave private institutions where they had to pay higher school fees and move to public less expensive schooling. Privatization – where elite schooling is inserted – was presented as a way to promote equal opportunities by means of the provision of educational services more adapted to the effective needs of the school populations and given the state's inability to do so (ESTÉVÃO, 2000).

If the defenders of private elite education stand for the right of parental choice of school and argue for the positive impacts of competitiveness on school quality and its effectiveness in retaining clients (CARNEIRO, 2006), the opponents of private elite education argue that the expansion of elite schools increases social inequalities. It contributes to the segregation among social groups on the basis of families' economic status and to the reproduction of intergenerational inequalities (SANTIAGO et al., 2004).

Generated by the difference in the educational provision, these problems come as result of the differentiated access to specific types of education. Private elite schools have higher resources and facilities and smaller compromise with the state in terms of accountability and the bureaucratic work it implies. Therefore, they can concentrate in the development of enriching student focused pedagogies. In turn mass education in mainstream public schools lacks resources and professional stimulus and is subject to a strict regime of accountability. As a result, the quality of the educational provision is reduced due to the lessening of the pedagogy and the deterioration of the human relation between teachers and students and among students it implies.

Moreover, as the economic elites have greater proximity to the school culture, including deeper understanding of its competitive and performative dimensions, educational choice may intensify the distance between the most vulnerable families and the school. They are more distant from the school culture and the educational systemic procedures and therefore have fewer tools to take advantage of the educational choice. Children and young adults in these groups also become discriminated due to the difficulty to use their cultural capital in school (BOURDIEU, 1986). The hierarchical nature of the educational system (BARROSO, 2003) and its elitism also become hidden by the attempt to

divide the education for the elite from the education for the poor (ABRANTES; QUARESMA, 2013) by means of differentiated provision. Besides, elite schools may select students of the upper classes, who can handle school fees, and out of school educational support such as supplementary lessons, increasing their likelihood to entry the most prestigious higher education institutions, a situation that puts at risk educational and social equity. The next section highlights the advantages the economic elites get from enrolling in the specific elite educational setting that was chosen for the development of the research.

Contexts and methods of empirical data collection

The main reasons for the selection of the school were the specificity of the curriculum, the character of the school population and the school cultural and educational uniqueness expressed by the school *ethos*; seen as a symbolic space of construction and assertion of a specific identity and culture (ARAÚJO et al., 2000). Two main features gained relevance. The first is the potential relation between the school *ethos* and the maintenance and reinforcement of a social status where consumption gains particular role (MOOIJ, 1998).

If we take into account that in a society of active consumers the power as consumers is structured by the financial resources, citizenship is conferred by the relationship with the public and private consumer markets, and participation in markets consumption is an important aspect of citizenship as a whole. This dimension takes a maximized sense in this group that develops its citizenship and social ties in a context where consumerism is legitimized and exacerbated as need, assuming a strong dimension in their school and out of school experiences (MACEDO, 2009).

The second characteristic is the claim for social assertion by means of the competitiveness among life styles and pathways (BECK, 1992). In this case, social assertion is rooted on the construction of individual careers centered on success and in the drive to take the top jobs in the professional hierarchies of the national and international globalized labor market. The relation between social class and educational choice is brought to evidence as middle and upper classes, the elites in particular, have greater awareness about how to take advantage of the educational choice (SANTIAGO et al., 2004) and about the advantages of being highly educated.

In a framework of top-down globalization where an "ethos of consumption" is supported by "processes of collaboration between leading states" (FALK, 1993, p. 39; BRECKER et al., 2002), the system of transnational competitiveness has vertical impact on the state role. The less powerful states lack influence at supranational decision-making and are object of exogenous pressure of accountability to greater global powers. Implanted in a semi-peripheral country this institution seems to overcome these difficulties through the offer of a transnational curriculum with expressed concerns for the environment, human rights, poverty and other burning issues of our time.

Having the power to rise above the political and educational controversies inherent to the limits of power of Portugal, a country in relative disadvantage in the global system and in Europe, the institution seems to strive for the idea of the construction of a "global citizen" (FALK, 1993; LISTER, 1997; ARNOT, 2009) in the name of Europeanism,

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internationalism and transnationalism. The supranational curricular matrix, which has inherent a specific set of rules and culture, seems to maximize the principles of remote management of the education system so that young adults become prepared to access standout careers, at national or international level. This becomes evident in the objectives set out in the policy documents of the school, in the accurate training of teachers, in the profile set for the 'good student', in the relation with the families and the careful monitoring of the educational process; in short, in all dimensions of its constituent *ethos*.

Standing for academic and relational excellence with a view to developing competences such as efficiency, competitiveness, flexibility and the capacity to work in a team, the *ethos* of this school responds and complements the *habitus* of the students, as fluid and unifying principles, so that the young adults of this collective are strengthened. Even if they are unique individuals (BERNSTEIN, 1996) that have the capacity to reinterpret and reconstruct the reality they live in and to introduce personal nuances in it, young adults are provided some homogeneous uniform living conditions, which create a system of uniform dispositions, suitable for engendering similar practices and that have a common set of objective properties (such as the possession of goods or powers) or incorporated properties, as the "class" *habitus* (BOURDIEU, 1970). The almost absence of symbolic violence that results of the proximity between the school *ethos* and relevant aspects of the students' *habitus* contributes to the almost natural absorption of the school culture, drives and rationalities.

As described by the school principal the school is recognized for its curriculum - that covers from preschool to grade 12 – and the construction of knowledge by means of "concept based learning" and other cooperative methodologies. The students are challenged to explore burning issues of the societal life and to come up with proposals for solution through various projects; an educational strategy inspired by the will to prepare students to be principled citizens and lifelong learners, able to intervene in social life and support less fortunate others. One may say that the use of cooperative methodologies which invest in the construction of social ties among students and with the teachers has the potential to turn the school into a "cognitive machine" (BOURDIEU, 1996; KENWAY; KOH, 2013) where resource is made to all possible tools for the production of a type of knowledge that moves and is transferable from the national to the global arena of the international educational market and of the international labor market.

The school has an international character and targets local, national and foreign students wishing to gain an education in English. The school promises a balanced, demanding and forward-looking education different from mainstream state education and other private schools in the area whose educational offer, frequently, only covered up until the 9th grade. Endorsed by the state, the school's transnational curriculum was produced by an international team of specialists who adapted the syllabi of the USA and the UK to the Portuguese mainstream curriculum, which included environmental Portuguese studies and Portuguese language in junior school (grades 1-4) and Portuguese language and history in middle and upper school (grades 5-8 and 9-12, respectively). The *lingua franca* of the school is English.

It is interesting to add that since the beginning of the school its curriculum included non-compulsory teaching of mandarin that anticipated the future role of China in the global markets, which came to be a growing reality in the most recent years. According to the school principal, the school provides for around 800 students from diverse countries, including China, Spain, England, Sweden, Japan, Poland, and the Netherlands. The school's educational program has evolved throughout the years in order to cater to the growing learner diversity. International evaluations have considered it one of the leading international schools in Iberia.

The ethnographic incursion in the school by one of the researchers for more than 10 years, previous to this research, provided an inside knowledge that required the critical reciprocation between proximity and distancing in the analysis of the realities experienced and observed. The students' status of privilege allows considering them a group of the economic elites. It is students' wealthy backgrounds that permit the access to a well-resourced school in terms of the provision of educational services supported by exquisite teachers, facilities and didactic resources. In the case of professionals who have leading careers in international enterprises, for example, the school fees may be paid by the parents' employers. Even if there is economic differentiation within the group, there is a high pattern of consumption that may be put together with the maintenance and reinforcement of social status (MOOIJ, 1998). This circumstance could be identified by the capacity to pay the school fees at the level of other international school in Europe and to purchase several school uniforms, school meals, and the accumulation of extracurricular activities and so forth. Social and cultural diverse backgrounds could be identified by parental occupations mainly in the liberal professions (as doctors and engineers) but also as footballers, diplomats, managers and entrepreneurs.

Building social ties and meanings within school

Several features in the school dynamics and human relations allow understanding how social ties – as rituals of consensus and binding that produce meanings – are constructed within the school. A good example is the development of celebrations that involve the whole school community and are intended at fostering the ties among the school population: cultural celebrations, related to music and singing of hymns and songs, sports celebrations, public prize giving to praise excellence or progress in academic, sporting, artistic or relational achievement; ceremonies to close the school year in which students are awarded diplomas of completion of education levels.

During the different ceremonies, in everyday life and in study visits, the use of the school uniform is a way of demarcation and identification of belonging to the group. It also promotes a more identical appearance leading to the construction of group identity. This uniform has taken various styles over the years, in response to the desire expressed by students who wear it. The uniform includes sets for sport, informal day to day uniform, and a more formal one that is mandatory in the group assembly days and other ceremonies. This diversity in the school uniform may also be seen as a subtle way to promote "consumerism"

under the idea of choice and exclusiveness in dressing associated with a certain life style (MACEDO, 2009).

Very common in the American and English educational systems, school assemblies have place within the same age groups and act as rituals of consensus and binding that promote a unity of values and symbolic features that support the cohesion in the group by means of the construction of the *habitus* (BOURDIEU, 1970). Reminded by their teachers and class directors students are to resolve matters and issues of everyday life, and the groups are actively involved in this process, while concurrently developing important skills such as team management, decision making and public presentation.

An exhilarating experience may be watching how more or less committed students – more or less creative, with more or less interference from teachers –, organize themselves and collaborate with each other to prepare and submit surprisingly articulated and interdisciplinary presentations, small class projects linked to curricular areas, small plays, poems written or selected by the students, short stories or the creative explanation of curriculum subjects. Students also participate in debates inside and outside the school - through collaboration with other entities – where different teams prepare to discuss a given topic by exploring its content and choosing a presentation style. These discussions are subject to individual and group assessment by a team of teachers, according to predefined criteria that are clarified in advance to the teams.

Also with consequences in the reinforcement of its *ethos*, the school makes the induction of new teachers in the institution and its socio-cultural environment. At the beginning of the academic year activities are organized for cultural immersion and to create the first social and cultural networks of support among members. This includes team building sessions that foster the transition of people from other cultures towards the school culture. These actions also aim to implement the construction of a sense of belonging and rapport to the school community to allow these teachers to integrate and collaborate efficiently in the improvement of the school environment. Teachers go through a double process of adjustment and enrichment of the school *ethos*, as school representatives in the construction of students' ties with the school and in the production of meanings. The professional practice is not developed in isolation but supported by an organizational structure that allows teachers to develop within the framework of conceptual principles of the school. Beyond ensuring greater security for young people, the surveillance of school breaks by teachers allows for a relation of proximity in this less formal space in which particular concerns or relational problems of the students may be shared and discussed (MACEDO, 2009). Giving access to individual specificities this opens the room to adjusted responses to students' needs.

The investment in the relationship with families is also relevant in the binding building process, since the search for consistency between the different systems of socialization becomes subtler and effective. Constituted as shareholders while the children attend the school the families – willing to do so – collaborate in its management and organization, make the mediation between the school and other less participatory families and participate in organizing social and cultural events, contributing to the school dynamics. By organizing actions on the different methodologies, the daily activities of

the students and on educational topics such as the design of sex education at school or dyslexia among others, the institution also invests in 'educating' the families. Parental adhesion to these actions, which has grown over the years, has been a real asset to the educational progress of the institution and the reinforcement of its *ethos* in that it allows families to understand and support school.

The strengthening up of the ties between the school and the family reduces the tension in this relationship, allowing the construction of higher engagement as partner stakeholders in the education of youth. The involvement of families also takes on other forms of cooperation because they are required to share their cultural and professional knowledge, to watch and evaluate the presentations of team work performed by students, collaborate in school plays, attend school lessons, assemblies and ceremonies. Apart from the usual meeting services for families to assess students' progress and performance, the school regularly opens its doors, allowing family members to visit the classrooms in order to be informed of the projects and activities in which their children are involved.

As active members in this process, young adults absorb the coherence between school and their families, a process that may contribute to assure that the social inheritance is in place. These might be seen as the contours of a "social paradise" (BOURDIEU, 1996; KENWAY; KOH, 2013) where full mutual acknowledgement enhances and confirms individual values within the values of the group if we let alone the risks of generalization and homogenization that hide the diverse struggles of the young generation in finding and asserting their own voices as we have analyzed somewhere else.

For young adults, the group of peers has a definite role in the construction of social ties that bring them together in school. That is why we bring their voices in direct speech as expressed during the group discussions and as pertinent contribution for this article. The theme of friendship, that is recurrent in the discussion sessions, generates great enthusiasm. Different concerns come to the fore but the dimensions of belonging, security, sincerity, respect, exchange of ideas, sharing; trust, durability, support, acknowledgement and mutual understanding are emphasized. A specific young man clarifies:

> Of course a lot is different but moral values have to be alike... When I say... well educated, I am talking about the same basic principles, the same education.

Consensually, in a text in which the ideas of some students complement the ideas of others with obvious connection, young adults state the value of "closeness", of a "friendship" that they do not know how to explain, but that is manifested "in little things", "in small situations". To be a friend implies recognition of the other. It means "to have a long lasting friendship... I know him, he knows me; we get along well", "When we are experiencing a difficult period... we have the support of friends, who are supposed to like us and we like them... they give us advice", "to vent... to speak freely", "not always to talk about problems, but sometimes, to listen to other people's problems".

Another aspect that deserves mentioning is the construction of a shared view of the world that emerges among peers even if with individual nuances. This includes the awareness of the strong level of competitiveness in the world they live in and of their

role in the construction of their own future as consequence of their school career. This becomes to the fore in students' narratives:

> Today is the worldwide competition and we need to take, "A" [top marks] in all the subjects if we want to go for the best, and among the "As" there are still people who will not get there because they have to choose between these people. We have to study because – even if it doesn't seem – we are already starting our life here... It is increasingly more important to take the best grades... ten years ago it would be much easier to get to a good university... If we do not enter into a good university, we cannot find a good job, we can have money problems in the future... We have to get very good marks so that we can go to a good university and get a good job in order to support our family... if we have. (Young man, Group Discussion).

Different strategies are developed in dealing with the compromise to manage the present. Girls generally assume responsibility for the results of their learning, giving priority and engaging with it with varying degrees of "sacrifice". Many young men develop procrastination strategies even though they are aware of the importance of competing and having the best possible results.

These narratives highlight not only the importance of building ties in this group but also a view of the school environment as place of construction of sociability(ies); a shared physical space that allows a sense of identity and belonging; where the construction and reinforcement of values and principles takes place. For some young adults these bonds may be disconnected from social class, socially accepted behavior and religiosity. As they see it the person "may even be a criminal... can be your friend the same". However, friendship implies the belief "In the same things, the principles of life... not to have the same religion", "not being rich or poor... or swear". Such ideas seem to establish the importance of rituals that promote ties and of the symbolic systems (BOURDIEU, 1982) built on shared successive rituals that articulate the common experiences. Stimulated by the institution, these systems will contribute to the construction of certain ways of living and being, establishing itself as instruments by which familiarities, alliances and also oddities will be strengthened; instruments by which class, gender and other forms of solidarity are rooted and work for the construction of a specific "we" close to the individual "I".

Final remarks

Having regard to the construction of the social ties and the symbolic construction of the personal world, the context that shelters and informs these processes is also challenged. This allowed reflecting on the symbolic construction of social reality which takes shape and gives meaning to the individual construction as subjects. The marks of the socialization processes, embodied by the social ties with and within school, replicate the tensions and opportunities present in the wider social context. The greater or lesser adhesion to competitiveness and the search for individualized assertion in future educational pathways and the subsequent insertion into the labor market was evidenced.

The ties with and within the group of belonging, which we emphasized, were manifested in strong bonds among peers. These are of particular importance and were associated with shared values, principles of life and common interests. This allows emphasizing the importance of schooling in the construction of meanings and social ties, in a context where the ideas of competitiveness, consumption and performance become naturalized. While girls and younger boys placed friendship in a space of fundamental affection, some of the older boys verbalized more strategic views of the human relations, associated with different categories and the protection against risk. This induces anticipating the development of strategic relations also with the wider world, when these young adults take the opportunity to enter the national or international competitive educational market and the labor market later on. Naturally accepting their situation of economic dependency of parents, many of these young adults are also seduced by consumerist and for maintaining the "needs" socially built for the exhibition of status. It is worth noticing that the possession of goods and the possibility to "lead a good life" associated with it were in the horizon of most people consulted.

Belonging to a selected group of the population, these students have the benefit of developing within an institution that works in all its dimensions to cater for their welfare, their balanced growth and integral development. The constant updating of the methodological, pedagogical and scientific knowledge that support its educational service within a view of proximity are good examples. Staff training in the procedures and principles the school advocates; material goods and resources in terms of facilities and technologies to implement learning; and the investment in the relationship with each student and their families who are captivate to the school experience and ethos, complement the strategies of the school in reinforcing the school ethos and increasing the students' engagement with it. Young adults become strengthened by the ties they develop with their peers and within an institution whose ethos reinforces the family economic culture and capital. An institution that affirms to be open to diversity and the specificity of each of the so-called "clients" in the school policy documents, and that invests in strengthening them in line with the values and principles it stands for; an institution that builds differentiation.

The choice of this educational private system can match the attempt of the families of the elites to maintain or strengthen their upward mobility in the social pyramid that was object of slight risk by means of the democratization of the access to public education. These elites seem to aim to establish themselves as carriers and transmitters of similar group values and rules that are validated by an idea of international common good, which might be achieved through the education systems, whose mechanisms allow the assumption of cultural frameworks of belonging.

It is also to be noted that taking on an exclusivist culture that has homogenizing entropy, by means of the bridging processes that were observed in the institution, seems to emerge as part of the attempt to (re)establishing a status of class. This status might be strengthened by means of an elite culture in which collective historical attempts take place to deal with the contradictions, ambiguities and complexities of social life and the policies inherent to the capitalist world. One may say that in the presence of various

modes of conceptualizing citizenship beyond the boundaries of the nation-state, one is basically a product of the forces of economic globalization, where young adults are seen and can become members of a sort of global elite culture with little or no connection with any particular country but where the evidence of a global civic sense of responsibility, may be contrasted with the investment in the individualized development of strategic pathways in education and in the global labor market.

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