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School Choice in the Chilean Upper Class: Community, Identity and Social Closure

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Abstract: This article presents the results of a study about the reasons, motives and meanings associated with school choice among Chilean upper-class families. School choice has become a relevant issue in educational policy debates about marketization and privatization because it is linked to social segregation dynamics. The Chilean upper social class is an appropriate social space to study these issues since this group educates their children in a hyper-segregated set of very expensive private schools. The study followed a qualitative approach, conducting semi-structured interviews and focus groups in a prototypical zone of the upper social class in Santiago, Chile. Our main findings show the enormous relevance of communitarian, social and cultural concerns when choosing schools, seeking an identification between family and school community based on shared worldviews and social relationships. If we consider this social space as an educational market with prices, competition and school choice, this would be a market heavily embedded in a dense social world that supports it and ultimately subordinates it. We also found some diversity within the upper social class, which is currently stressed by some processes of socio-cultural diversification.

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Elección de escuela en la clase alta chilena: Comunidad, identidad y cierre social

Resumen: Este artículo presenta los resultados de un estudio cuyo objetivo fue comprender las razones, motivos y significados asociados a la elección de escuela por parte de las familias de clase alta chilena. La elección de escuela ha pasado a ser un tema relevante del debate de política educacional sobre mercado y privatización, al estar asociado a dinámicas de segregación social. La clase alta chilena ofrece un espacio social privilegiado para estudiar estos asuntos, toda vez que se educa hiper-segregadamente en escuelas privadas de alto costo. Los hallazgos –basados en una investigación cualitativa en la cual se realizaron entrevistas y grupos de discusión en la zona prototípica de la clase alta de Santiago- muestran la enorme relevancia de consideraciones comunitarias, sociales y culturales al momento de elegir escuela, buscando una identificación de la familia con la comunidad escolar a partir de visiones de mundo y relaciones sociales compartidas. Si consideramos este espacio social como un mercado escolar, puesto que hay libre elección, precios y competencia, se trata de un mercado incrustado en una densa sociabilidad que lo soporta y en último término subordina. También encontramos cierta diversidad al interior de la clase alta, tensionada por procesos internos de heterogeneización socio-cultural.

Palabras clave: elección de escuela; privatización educacional; estudios cualitativos; segregación educacional; sentido de la acción social; clase alta

Escolha da escola na classe alta chilena: Comunidade, identidade e encerramento social

Resumo: Este artigo apresenta os resultados de um estudo cujo objetivo foi compreender os motivos, motivos e significados associados à escolha da escola pelas famílias de classe alta chilenas. A escolha da escola tornou-se um tópico relevante do debate sobre políticas educacionais sobre mercado e privatização, estando associada à dinâmica da segregação social. A classe alta chilena oferece um espaço social privilegiado para estudar essas questões, uma vez que é educada hiper-segregada em escolas particulares de alto custo. Os resultados—baseados em uma investigação qualitativa em que foram realizadas entrevistas e grupos de discussão na zona prototípica da classe alta de Santiago—mostram a enorme relevância das considerações comunitárias, sociais e culturais na escolha de uma escola, buscando a identificação de a família com a comunidade escolar baseada em visões de mundo e relações sociais compartilhadas. Se considerarmos esse espaço social como um mercado escolar, uma vez que há livre escolha, preços e concorrência, é um mercado incorporado a uma densa sociabilidade que o sustenta e, por fim, subordina. Também encontramos alguma diversidade dentro da classe alta, enfatizada por processos internos de heterogeneização sociocultural.

Palavras-chave: escolha de escola; privatização educacional; estudos qualitativos; segregação educacional; senso de ação social; classe alta

Introduction

This article analyzed the school choice in what, in a broad sense, is called the upper class in Chile. The work is part of a larger research effort that included equivalent analyzes on the middle (Canales, Bellei, & Orellana, 2016) and low (Bellei et al. 2016) sectors. The general purpose has been to understand the cultural substrate that sustains the school choice made by families of different social classes. The relevance of the study is easily seen if the choice of school is considered as a pillar of an educational system defined as a "school market", for which the "preferences" of families would constitute the ultimate criterion for guiding its development (Chubb & Moe, 1990), as Chilean institutions have done since the neoliberal reform of 1980.

The interesting thing about studying the Chilean upper class in this context is that, since they are educated almost exclusively in schools and high schools that do not receive public resources, their level of exposure to the neoliberal reform in school education has been less. Even more, it is possible to affirm that in various ways Chilean educational policy has been discussed and sometimes designed having this sector of private schools financed exclusively with fees charged to families as the institutional reference (Atria, 2010; Bellei, 2016), since that in this socio-educational space all the conditions would exist for the emergence of a true free school market.

By the way, the Chilean upper class has been strongly affected by market policies in education at the post-secondary level, especially given the enormous increase in professionals and the creation or consolidation of universities focused on this social sector (Orellana, 2017). Thus, by situating these changes in university education as part of the internal transformations promoted by neoliberal modernization in the dominant social sectors, the question of how and why they choose school acquires additional interest. It is a question of understanding this practice in the context of the strategies of social closure and reproduction over time of the upper class, investigating the way in which its members fight for the conquest of better positions or consolidate those achieved.

In general terms, the interest in school choice as part of the strategies of mobility and class reproduction is relatively recent. In the post-industrial era, education expands at all levels, intensifying the degree to which it distributes opportunities and produces social ties, under the meritocratic promise of greater efficiency and equity. Traditionally, the role of education in social reproduction has been investigated according to the degree to which family cultural capital, even in the context of democratization of access, continued to determine academic performance and the accumulation of cultural capital in general, under the justification of individual talent or merit demonstrated in the educational process, thus legitimizing a certain class position (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2009; Collins, 1979; Shavit & Blossfeld, 1993). In that analysis, the choice of educational institution by families did not play a relevant role. It was with the promotion of market-oriented education policies that occurred in recent decades that the question of the effects of school choice on educational equity and quality, and more broadly, on its social meaning, was established (Orellana et al., 2018).

This is how the promotion of school choice is established in the middle and upper class sectors not so much to separate themselves from the working class (with which they have little in common), but as forms of distinction within the middle classes, even in countries with a social democratic tradition based on public education systems, which has important effects on the social segregation of systems (Kosunen & Seppänen, 2015, Yoon, 2016, and the different works contained in Bonal & Bellei, 2018). In addition, recently in Latin America, the installation of the public-private cleavage begins to be relevant to understand the trends of segregation and reproduction of the upper classes built under the aegis of the neoliberal turn, as has been studied in Argentina and Brazil (Almeida, Giovine, Alves & Ziegler, 2017; Tiramonti & Ziegler, 2008). This study is part of that growing concern.

The rest of the article is organized as follows. In the next section, elements of context are provided about the socio-educational situation of the upper class in Chile; then, the state of the art of research on school choice in the upper class is summarized; then, the study method is explained; in the following results section, the main findings of our research are presented; and finally, a brief interpretive discussion closes the article.

The Chilean Socio-Educational Context: The Hyper-Segregation of the Upper Class

As is known, Chile is one of the most unequal countries in the world (CEPAL, 2010). This inequality is characterized by the extreme concentration of wealth, given that the income differences within the—let's say- "lower 90%" of the population are comparatively smaller (Castro & Kast, 2004; López, Figueroa & Gutiérrez, 2013; Ruiz Encina & Orellana, 2011). Thus, the upper sectors are narrow and their distance (increasing) from the rest of the population is the most substantial abyss of the Chilean social structure (Espinoza, Barozet & Méndez, 2013; Torche & Wormald, 2004). This high-income inequality in Chile has been associated with the low observed mobility (Núñez & Miranda, 2010), which configures a pattern of relative social closure of the Chilean upper class, given the little inter-generational mobility of long-term (Méndez & Gayo, 2018; Ruiz Encina & Boccardo, 2014; Torche & Wormald, 2004).

The limited social mobility to access the upper class, however, coexists with a certain absolute growth of this social sector in recent decades, considering not only entrepreneurs, but also high-income professionals, which partly reconfigures their social bases (Espinoza, Barozet & Méndez, 2013; Méndez & Gayo, 2018; Ruiz Encina & Boccardo, 2014; Torche & Wormald, 2004). Thus, within the business world, the loss of importance of the agricultural sector in the hands of the financial, mining and services sectors, modifies the relative importance of property, while increasing the relevance of high professionals at the top of the social structure.

The internal differentiation of the upper class is relevant in this process. The annual study by The Boston Consulting Group (BCG) on global wealth, establishes that the assets of the upper sectors in Chile are growing more rapidly at the top of the pyramid than at its base. While about the richest 10% of the population (421,694 families) has liquid assets of more than $100,000 USD (the base of the pyramid), 45 families exceed $100 million dollars in this same type of instruments (BCG, 2015). The same report states that family offices—financial advisory firms—even displace banks and other entities of the type in the management of the liquid assets of these segments, highlighting the weight of family structures.

In a recent study, Méndez and Gayo (2018) discuss the diversification of the upper middle class, between the "heirs"—the groups with long-standing emplacement in such a position, with greater access to property and rents as income instead of work—and other groups of newcomers to the upper middle class, almost entirely dependent on salary and professional positions (Méndez & Gayo, 2018).

In the end, the dominant sectors separate themselves from the country to an extreme degree, while at the same time experiencing, in their own dynamics of constitution, the effects of recent neoliberal modernization, which subjects them to a process of internal income concentration and social differentiation.

In the educational dimension, the Chilean upper class is educated almost exclusively in private centers that do not receive state funding, but are financed by charging incorporation fees, tuition and fees to families (Méndez & Gayo, 2018; Moya & Hernández, 2014). The enormous and growing overlap between this type of establishment and the upper sectors to which they preferentially serve is clear when it is found that, despite the accelerated process of educational privatization that occurred in Chile as a consequence of the 1980 market reform, non-publicly funded schools have maintained relatively stable their participation in the national enrollment,

representing (according to official data) around 8.2% in 1990 and 7.8% in 2015. Furthermore, the higher-income sectors have been moving away from public education and concentrating in this type of establishment. Thus, for example, while in 1990 54.7% of the students in the richest decile of the Chilean population were educated in non-subsidized private establishments, this proportion had risen to 66% in 2015, while their attendance at public establishments fell from 20.5% to 7.8% in the same period[1].

A far-reaching effect of the strong concentration of income combined with the dynamics of the educational market has been the emergence of a sharp socioeconomic school segregation. Estimates using the Duncan Dissimilarity Index found high segregation of the lower sectors, close to 0.5, but even higher in the upper sectors (around 0.6-), referred to as hyper-segregation (Valenzuela, Bellei, & de los Rios, 2014), being one of the highest estimated levels among countries that have comparable data. The consideration of both phenomena (high social segregation at both ends of the distribution) has been described as a scenario of high and growing polarization of Chilean education (Villalobos & Valenzuela, 2012). Regarding its causes, controlling for the effect of residential segregation, it was found that the presence of non-state-funded private schools was one of the relevant factors in the production of socioeconomic school segregation (Valenzuela, Bellei, & de los Rios, 2014).

Social hyper-segregation combined with the institutional autonomy of these private schools produce the conditions that facilitate the socio-educational reproduction of the Chilean upper class. A recent study characterizes the practices of this sector as regimes of inequity that configure a "diversity without diversity", where selection in the admission processes operates as a social class selector, and their educational proposals share social isolation, relational endogamy and the managerial curriculum, among others (Madrid, 2016). These are key devices of selection, socialization and sociability through which the Chilean elite is reproduced (Moya & Hernández, 2014). These social networks formed in the school-high school and the mere belonging to the upper class are so powerful that it has been shown to significantly increase people's salary earnings (Núñez & Gutiérrez, 2004) and the probability of accessing elite managerial jobs, over the effect of obtaining a professional degree and having good academic performance, even in selective and prestigious universities, reinforcing social affiliation over meritocracy as a selector principle of the Chilean upper class (Núñez & Miranda, 2010).

Finally, it is important to note that access to these private establishments is not guaranteed even if the economic resources for it are available. The application of additional filters, such as academic demands on students, parent interviews, or membership in a certain religion, is practically universal in this sector. In fact, as early as the 1990s, more than 80% of the non-subsidized private establishments in the Metropolitan Region of Santiago applied academic admission tests to their students (a prevalence of more than double compared to subsidized private schools), a finding that was replicated nationally a decade later (Bellei, 2013) and has been subsequently endorsed, along with other social, religious and cultural selection devices of families (Carrasco, Donoso, & Mendoza, 2016; Godoy, Salazar & Treviño, 2014).

The Study of School Choice: The Relative Opacity of the Upper Sectors

The changes we have mentioned push towards a transformation of the family-school relationship, which makes the sociological study of school choice a gateway to this process. This question suggests questioning the degree of secularization of social ties in the upper sectors and the mechanisms that produce and reproduce their social closures. Starting from the weak modern character of the dominant classes of the continent expressed for example in a social closure of social

[1] The authors' estimates are based on CASEN data from 1990 and 2015.

status as opposed to a more meritocratic formation of the elite (Cardoso & Faletto, 1981; Quijano, 2000), and without space for a State Nobility as Bourdieu investigated in France (Bourdieu, 1998), Latin American upper classes tend to increasingly barricade themselves in private education as a social closure strategy and less in the centers of high academic performance of public education (Almeida et al., 2017). Thus, the defense of "freedom of education" is better understood as the autonomy of the dominant sectors with respect to public services and not so much as a defense of cultural diversity (Bellei & Orellana, 2015).

The academic debate on school choice highlights the close relationship between choice, competition, segregation, and class position (Orellana et al., 2018). Academic-based social reproduction is added to the spatial segregation that drives school choice, facilitating educational separation between the middle class and the working class, and promoting the concentration of responsibilities in families that were previously located in the public sphere, with the respective processes of social differentiation and individuation that this triggers (Ball, Bowe, & Gewirtz, 1995; Butler & van Zanten, 2007). In the post-welfare era, social opportunities are privatized and common spaces—also in education—are eroded.

However, there are relatively fewer studies on school choice in the upper class than in the middle sectors (Orellana et al., 2018), probably because it is considered that their educational segregation dynamics do not constitute a novelty, but a long-lasting trait, that combines academic selectivity, high monetary resources, and community dynamics (van Zanten, 2009). A novel aspect of this literature are the choices promoted by market policies that open up opportunities for differentiation within public education through academically selective, meritocratic-oriented projects, which are compatible with an individualistic approach to social mobility that is part of the neoliberal imaginary (Kosunen & Seppänen, 2015; Yoon, 2016). These policies, while allowing public education to remain competitive, also welcome the differentiation sought by "new middle class" professionals, in a kind of transaction to avoid their flight from the public system, in the same way that Magnet Schools and other school choice proposals have been promoted within the public system in the United States.

In Latin America, school choice and the presence of private education have been associated with high levels of social segregation in educational systems (evidence for Argentina, Brazil, Peru, and Chile is presented in Bonal & Bellei, 2018). It is interesting to note that these processes of public/private socio-educational segmentation begin to replace other traditional curricular segmentation processes that took place within public education, either by the presence of highly selective academically oriented public high schools or because low-income sectors were educated in vocational teaching modalities (Almeida et al., 2017; Tiramonti & Ziegler, 2008). But even within the upper class, significant diversity has been documented. A study focused on school choice in the upper class of Buenos Aires, in addition to reaffirming the social sense of the choice, identifies the internal tension between a more liberal "modern" sector and a "traditional" sector close to Catholic education (Gessaghi, 2013). More generally, Tiramonti & Ziegler (2008) emphasize a certain restructuring in the relationship between the elite and education in Argentina, where individual strategies are more decisive than community logics and, in turn, these strategies are not sedimented in tradition, but are changing, which produce a high heterogeneity in educational experiences intended for the formation of Argentine leadership groups.

Seen in perspective, it seems that in the upper class, the school-family relationship is being strained by the current post-industrial modernization dynamics, which, by expanding and diversifying the professional middle class—service classes (Goldthorpe, 1992)—they rethink the effectiveness of the classic mechanisms of closure of the dominant layers, including high academic performance and money. In an increasingly competitive context where education increases its relevance for the intergenerational transmission of privilege, the upper classes press for greater

control over institutionalized cultural capital given its growing importance for the transmission of social and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1990).

The sociological research on school choice in Chile is in its early stages. Its focus has been to investigate the degree to which the market dynamic is reflected in the behavior of families, mainly in the emerging middle and popular sectors; that is, where the most visible effects of neoliberal modernization are concentrated (Bellei, et al. 2016; Canales, Bellei, Orellana, 2016; Córdoba, 2012; Gubbins, 2013; Madrid, 2016; Navarro, 2004; Raczynski & Hernández, 2011). Consequently, a good part of the effort has been to understand the sociocultural rationality behind the choice of public versus subsidized private schools in these segments.

School choice in the Chilean upper class has not been the subject of sociological inquiry. In an exploratory study on the educational strategies of the upper class (which included considerations about school choice as a particular moment in these processes), it was found that the social character of the strategy contains and in some way conditions the rich pedagogical and cultural significance of education, which nevertheless strives for a comprehensive development of children; this would imply that the social composition of the school and a certain sense of community belonging would predominate over purely educational criteria in school choice (Gubbins, 2014). In fact, it has been found that for the upper class, the central thing is the choice of a residential area that guarantees endogamous social ties, and therefore the choice of school is lived as an extension of that accumulation of social capital, although increasingly combined with the acquisition of "new" skills such as critical thinking and artistic skills (Méndez & Gallo, 2018). This combination of instrumental logic and social rationality in school choice helps to explain why upper-class families, when perceiving a tension between desirable social justice principles and private interests of social reproduction, end up (in the cases studied) prioritizing the latter when choosing school for their children (Carrasco, Donoso & Mendoza, 2016).

In conclusion, although the social nature of school choice has been identified as the principle that organizes it transversally, the evidence accumulated on the upper class is still very limited to validate this finding in these sectors and eventually know the form that this principle would acquire in them. From the perspective of the debate on market-based educational policies, the study has an additional interest, since in Chile the state-funded school system has promoted the free choice of schools, having as a reference the private subsystem in which the upper-class studies, but without evidence about these processes in this sector. Our research seeks to contribute to filling these gaps.

Methodology

As it was said, this paper presents empirical evidence constructed in a larger research project, which aimed to study the socio-cultural foundations of the Chilean school market, and its general objective, to understand the reasons, motives and meanings associated with the school choice by families from different social classes, in this case, the upper class. Applying qualitative methodologies (Canales, 2014; Taylor & Bogdan 1996), the school choice processes of families from low, middle and upper classes were studied, with the empirical phase developing during 2013 and 2014. Each social class constituted a particular case of inquiry, a "case-zone" determined by its territorial location and social character. This design was intended to capture the meaning and reconstruct the process of a complex act such as choosing a school for children, hence its qualitative character; likewise, by initially selecting families based on their place of residence and class situation, we sought to avoid the bias of a study organized around schools. This article reports the main findings referred to upper-class families, thus complementing the results on lower (Bellei et al., 2016) and middle (Canales, Bellei, & Orellana, 2016) classes.

The social sector investigated to address school choice in high social sectors corresponds to the majority fractions of the service classes and the business community, which, due to the historical specificities of the country, converge in a space of social relations. Such social communality—debated from market studies to sociological analysis—allows us to study them from a class perspective. As was pointed out in the literature review, although this social sector in Chile is comparatively more closed and less dynamic in its structure than the adjacent middle bands, it has also changed significantly in recent decades (Ruiz Encina & Boccardo, 2014; Torche & Wormald, 2004). Therefore, the article does not limit itself to the elite—which is certainly recruited from these sectors—but encompasses a broader segment that is inserted in the upper positions of the socio-occupational structure. It is mostly high-wage earners, who together with the business community, concentrate a good part of the national income. Families were selected taking into account their residential area (high-income sectors in Vitacura, Las Condes and a part of Providencia) and the attendance of their children at private schools with high tuition fees, taking care to have some traditionally linked to the Chilean upper class (who had this character at least three decades ago; we then refer to them as "pre-1981", to mean that they existed and fulfilled this role even before the neoliberal reform of the dictatorship) and others of more recent creation, but located in high-income sectors in Santiago (i.e. "post-1981"); it was also foreseen that there would be families from secular and Catholic religious schools in both categories (given the historical and contemporary relevance of the Catholic Church in the education of the Chilean upper class). Assuming the qualitative character of the sample, it could not cover all the combinations that exist in Chile, so we focused on the most representative ones in each situation, thus, the pre-1981 religious schools are all Catholic from well-established congregations in the Chilean upper class and that have educated them for several generations; the post-1981 religious schools are from neoconservative Catholic congregations that have acquired a prominent place in the upper class only recently (Thumala, 2007); the pre-1981 secular schools do not officially belong to any church (although they may teach religion classes, as in Chile public schools also do) and most of them are either from foreign colonies or have their stamp on bilingual academic education, while the post-1981 secular schools combine some oriented to bilingual academic education with others of non-traditional curricular-pedagogical proposals (Méndez & Gayo, 2018).

The study used two complementary techniques for gathering information: focus groups and in-depth interviews. Focus groups are designed to explore the "group morality", and their use allowed us to access the social representation of what should and should not be done when choosing a school for children, and the ways in which subjects interpret this practice (Canales; 2006; Ibáñez, 1979). The groups lasted for about an hour and a half, and were conducted flexibly around the criteria and values involved in school choice, allowing a spontaneous flow of conversation. In-depth interviews allowed us to know precisely these decision-making practices, the reasons and motives that people have when choosing a school, and the particular modulations of each experience (Bryman, 2012). The interviews typically lasted an hour and were conducted in a semi-structured way, following a general guideline that inquired about their educational trajectories, their knowledge of the schools in the area, the way and criteria with which they identified/discarded schools for their children, the experience of participating in the admission/enrollment processes, their educational expectations for their children, and their general view of education and the way in which it is organized institutionally and socially in Chile. In total, 13 interviews were conducted with parents/guardians (7 from traditional schools pre-1981 and 6 from post-1981 schools, including balanced religious and secular in both)[2], and 2 focus groups, one with parents/guardians of Catholic

[2] In order to identify prototypical traditional and recently created schools of this social sector in this area, we made use of the available secondary sources, press information, key informants and our own expert knowledge.

religious schools and another, of secular schools (including balanced pre-post 1981 schools in both groups, with 7 participants each). Four interviews were also conducted with key informants in the sector (an education expert, a local Ministry of Education official, and two school principals in the sector), to obtain a general picture of the school supply/demand dynamics in this area. The findings described below are based on the sociological analysis and interpretation of this empirical record.

The analysis of the discourse produced worked on the two axes of meaning coherence (Ibáñez, 1979; Taylor & Bogdan, 1996). On the one hand, the identification of paradigms, a set of elements that overlap on an axis of meanings and unfold them in their multiple forms; on the other hand, the identification of the syntagma, or the logical and expressive coherence that may exist between the identified paradigms. Coherence thus results in the organization of the effects of meaning into categories (themes) and sequences (parts) that as a whole lead in the same direction. Each group and each interview were coded in an open way and analyzed as a unit; later the analysis sought to understand deeply the act of choosing a school. The analysis as a whole allowed us to identify common elements that make up a prototypical school choice logic of the Chilean upper class. Additionally, with the material produced it was possible to build "ideal types" of high school voters, that is, particular modulations in which the common prototype manifests itself. Of course, in reality (individual and group) the identified elements are presented with nuances, but our purpose was to discover the common sense that organizes them, which we describe in a stylized way that allows us to contrast them.

Results

As anticipated, the results are presented in two levels. First, and based fundamentally on the analysis of the focus groups, the school choice in the upper sectors is reconstructed in its common or prototypical expression, identifying its fundamental dimensions as nuclei of meaning. Next, based mainly on the individual interviews, the particular modulations of this common orientation are presented, grouped into typologies of choice, detailing how the dimensions previously exposed are specifically organized[3].

Prototypical Upper-Class School Choice

If we consider this social space as a school market, since there is free choice, prices, and competition, it is a market embedded in a dense sociability that supports it and ultimately subordinates it (Polanyi, 1992). In the words of a father interviewed in Chile, "they test you by asking you about the school: you enter my circle or you don't enter." This suggests that the forms of rationalization in school choice do not correspond centrally to the instrumental rationality of the market. Tuition, for example, is not seen as rational market prices, but as arbitrary barriers that mark the sufficiency of the group; as a mother interviewed said, "schools charge what they want." The prototypical upper-class school choice can be measured along two axes or cores of meaning for the subjects: the identification of eligible schools as complex projects and the tension involved in the process of mutual family-school choice.

Due to the small and geographically concentrated nature of the Chilean upper class, as explained, it was not problematic to draw up these lists, given that the sources were quite convergent. To guarantee the anonymity of the sources, we do not identify these schools here.

[3] The references to the empirical material include a selection of quotes that support the findings and illustrate the speech of the interviewees, but it is important to note that our interpretation is the result of the global analysis of the evidence produced, both from the interviews and from the groups, which turned out to be highly convergent.

Private Schools in Chile: Horizontal Differentiation among Complex Educational Projects. Chilean high-income families share fundamental elements of their vision of the school system and their dynamic in the family-school relationship. They identify private schools without public funding as close to them; thus, they delimit what is eligible. They perceive a significant diversity, but also a certain categorical homogeneity of the schools to which they send their children: they are all viable educational options that guarantee good "quality" (to the point that it is practically not discussed). There is no talk of failed schools, as happens in the lower classes, whose school choice is based on identifying and avoiding schools that do not teach or are frankly dangerous spaces (Bellei et al. 2016; Canales, Bellei, & Orellana, 2016). Certainly, performance and competitiveness in their basic form are taken for granted. Even the performance, in its public institutional version (i.e. SIMCE tests with which the Ministry of Education monitors academic achievement, or PSU with which the most prestigious universities select their students) is central, and the obsession with it is rejected. Moreover, the supposed simplicity of the establishments that stand out only by leading the rankings of official standardized measurements is criticized. This label is assigned (almost always with a disqualifying connotation) to highly selective traditional public high schools, but also to some new private projects that are doubted.

> I believe that today these emblematic schools, such as the [traditional public high school with high academic selectivity], are for people of a level that cannot afford a private school and want their children to succeed in today's world, to have a good chance of entering university and be, in many cases, the first professionals in the family. (Group, religious)

There are certainly differences in prestige (basically associated with history), which produces more demanded schools, but does not make the rest of the group unacceptable; in fact, prestige alone does not determine the choice. The choice of school is here a dense sociocultural matter, which involves philosophies of life or visions of the world—in the Gramscian and Orteguian sense—and reaches, although with less precision, to pedagogy. Thus, the first rule of school choice in the upper class is the cultural congruence between the family and the institution. Schools are identified and selected according to complex formations, which rarely have equivalences and therefore are not interchangeable or directly comparable, for example, according to their price, in the way that a simple market logic would assume: there are those rooted in religious traditions such as Catholic, with all its internal varieties; and lay people of colony, of ethnic, educational, or other traditions. In fact, all these institutions recognize themselves as bearers of well-formulated pedagogical philosophies, qualitatively different, rather than hierarchical by their effectiveness, whose centrality for the upper class has also been studied in Argentina (Tiramonti & Ziegler, 2008). The constellation of meaning regarding schools is argumentative and rational in a communicative sense rather than instrumental. In fact, there is neither in schools nor in families an explicit prioritization for academic achievement, probably by taking for granted a high performance, this dimension ceases to be a reason for differentiation and argumentation, nevertheless some more recent educational projects highlight this dimension, as the literature has shown (Moya & Hernández, 2014) and we will discuss below. Thus, the socio-cultural significance of the institutions prevails. A horizontal differentiation of complex educational proposals, rather than vertical based, for example, on one-dimensional performance rankings.

> It is a quite cosmopolitan school and I like it because it has the theme of integration, there are children with Asperger's, Down's syndrome (…), so that children also know that not everyone is the same, not everyone has the same abilities, and that's why I liked it, it's also fully bilingual. (Group, secular)

Family-School: The Imperative of Mutual Choice. Following a well-established conception of child education as something essential in their constitution as people and in their incorporation into the community or group of belonging, the prototypical high-class elector seeks a comprehensive project that generates a synthesis between community, individuality of the subject and academic achievement. Socio-cultural criteria are dominant. This forces parents to carefully inform themselves about schools, accumulating detailed knowledge, practically of a professional. Each enrollment would be the meeting between a complex demand and a complex offer.

> I think they also accept parents a lot, in the end, they take your picture, to see if you look like the school's project. (Group, religious)

Nonetheless, upper-class families perceive the difficulty not so much in choosing the school, but in being accepted. The choice is experienced both from the family to the school and from the school to the family; in a process of tense mutual identification, highly demanding, of which –they believe—the success of the family project depends.

> In my case, it was very difficult. I felt very intimidated because the children went to their tests and games, but when it was time for the interview with the principal, they first gave them a psychological test, and when you go to the meeting with the principal, the principal almost knows your children better than you do. That's already very heavy. And it's like they interrogate you a lot, to see if you somehow give an image like the one she has. Because she flips through the pages and says "this came out on the test" and you start to explain everything. (Group, secular)

> Even the parents take an exam (…) they give you weightings and within the weighting of admission, when you are a former student, they weigh you more, so even though the girl took a very good test, she did not exceed the weighting of the daughters of former students. (Group, religious)

As a result, these families also share the almost universal experience of having undergone severe and stressful selection processes by schools. According to their accounts, the scene of the applications can be traumatic. It would seem that in this social sector, the institution ultimately chooses: parents identify a school to which they apply to be chosen; schools choose who they accept.

> It's not that we choose, but rather that education in Chile practically chooses you. I have a friend who applied to 10 schools to get her children placed, but in the end, the schools chose her children. (Group, secular)

> As my youngest daughter, who has problems, was rejected, I started looking for schools for her. I had her in several small schools. (Group, religious)

The test is of belonging and social admission: it is the sociocultural way in which overdemand is resolved, when price adjustment does not guarantee community coherence, even more so if these families are willing to pay what schools charge for belonging. This shows the limits of market competition and the emergence of a "club" logic. It is the time when they must appear as applicants, exposed to what they perceive as an almost totalitarian power of the institution: they feel "investigated" and tested for status consistency.

> The fact that the school chooses similar families is a pro and a con. They do it because it is easier for the school, not because it is more enriching for the child. Therefore, they choose homogeneous families and give the child a homogeneous environment. (Group, secular)

> Schools tend to homogenize as much as possible with respect to parents, families, or children, because it makes it easier for them to deliver knowledge to children. If they are all more or less at the same level, come from more or less the same places, or are children who do not have… it is much easier for you to teach them, because you will not have rebellious or restless people or people who disagree with you. (Group, religious)

Schools look for several guarantees of homogenization and loyalty of the applicant: in the cognitive and psychological performance of the child, that is, his "normality" for high-performance learning, in the high socioeconomic profile, which adds onerous "incorporation" fees to the high tuition, and in the sociocultural profile, from speech and clothing to beliefs.

> You also apply and submit the paperwork, they call you to have the child take the exams, and then they call the two parents to have an interview with the director. The children take two exams on different days. If the children pass the exam, they call the parents, and the parents have two interviews, one with the psychologist and counselor, and the other with the catechism department, also for two days. (Group, secular)

> They do a kind of internal X-ray of the child, and they analyze you and investigate you so much that it's uncomfortable. (Group, secular)

> You can go in and say that you have a tremendous position, but I think they also look a lot at who you are, how you speak, how you dress, I think they see the picture a little. (Group, religious)

The insecurity for families does not end with admission: the possibility of expulsion of their children is always latent. The annoyance with institutions that not only control entry, but also the conditions of permanence, resonates widely. A system centered on its own class reproduction is perceived, and not on its ability to welcome the diversity of its children. For families, these demands put the integrality of their children at risk, a fundamental part of what is being sought.

> They want children who are practically geniuses or super gifted, the problematic child, they immediately call you "the child is intelligent, but he is restless" (Group, secular)

> I think these high-performing schools don't have any flexibility with any type of difficulty. It's like, "He's out, out the door at the first sign of trouble" (...) If the child is a little restless, they're out the door. (Group, religious)

For students, remaining as a student demands all the samples of ability for high performance. Failure is punished with expulsion, or more subtle treatments, such as referral to a psychologist, a psychopedagogue, and other forms of correction.

> Education is now super business-oriented, so they don't care about the children, and when a child has a problem, take him to a psychologist, take him to a psychopedagogue, take him to a neurologist, give him Aradix, on the bottom they are very focused on making this business of education work perfectly, so when there is someone who bothers me, they call the parents and refer them. (Group, secular)

> Unfortunately, schools are now service companies. They teach children, but you also have to send them a static child, that is, a child who does not move, does not ask questions, and does nothing. (Group, religious)

What is revealed is the harshness of the formation of the dominant sectors; parents resent it at the same time that they seek it.

> Because I think we walk with her through all the schools of Santiago, because she is a bad student, I have to admit, she doesn't like to study, she cannot take any medication, not even Ritalin. (Group, religious)

School Voters Typology from High Class. As it had been seen, the prototypical choice is perceived as a classical inheritance of communities, schools and identities that precede the current Chile and that symbolize belonging to the dominant segments. They are long-lasting features. But such inertia, still predominant, experiences new tensions that families thematize. As usually happens with the novelty, these elements produce conversation and force a position, thus modulating the choice of school with respect to the common norm analyzed. The high sectors are changing and, with it, the conservation of such positions through education (S. Madrid, 2016; Méndez & Gayo, 2018; Moya & Hernández, 2014).

In essence, the advance of a professional middle-class ethos is perceived, expressed in the diversification of the social origin of the students of schools with greater tradition. It is becoming increasingly difficult for them to maintain a proper elite sign. The traditional aristocratic-oligarchic dynamic cedes its space to one of high professionals, archetypically service classes (Goldthorpe, 1992). A school manager (key informant) points out:

> This school, in its origins, in the 1950s and 1960s, was a school with many more families of entrepreneurs, but that has decreased. The number of professionals who work for a salary has increased a lot.

On the other hand, new neo-conservative community project schools appear to reclaim the elite void, or the traditional ones move geographically to more exclusive neighborhoods and of recent data, seeking to avoid the aforementioned social diversification of their base. This emerging space is characterized by an interviewee as "high elite" (redundant expression, but typical of the Chilean way of speaking when it wants to highlight the genuine and distinguish it from the merely apparent), when it defines it in opposition to a traditional Catholic school.

> There is basically education or class. Here you have —and I would tell you that, in high-elite schools, even more so —social clubs, they are social centers, social development centers ... I don't know how to call them. (Principal, man, key informant)

In fact, although the voice of traditional Catholic schools is still the main one, it is increasingly surrounded by the described polarization process, between a socially more diverse logic and another of high elite. These three voices are the ones that emerge clearly and allow the typology of three categories of school choice in the high classes investigated: the traditional community (which can be based on Catholicism, but also on other community criteria, such as belonging to foreign colonies), the neo-communitarian (which in our study we only observed associated with neo-conservative Catholic schools), and the enlightened perspective of high professionals (which is less associated with a particular type of school, since it is a more "mobile" voter). It is important to emphasize that these categories refer to school choice logics and do not therefore mechanically correspond to types of schools, although—as we mentioned—they tend to be linked.

The Traditional Communitarian Elector. The traditional communitarian elector chooses a school as a fundamental part of community life. At the limit, there is almost no choice, since participation in their community constitutes the subject, beyond their individuality and beyond society, practically fixing the same social framework community-family. The community of belonging has a sediment of meaning that comes from past generations, most of the time with an important religious component, but also in secular versions, especially as foreign colonies.

> Everyone applies because they like the school, not because of its location, not because it is close, it is because they are interested in the school. I think that most students do not live close to the school, but their parents feel that it is worth the commute because that is the school they want. The schools are not interchangeable: it is not like saying, "Well, if it is not the [traditional private religious school], it could be this other one that is the same," because in truth there is no other one that is the same. It is people who are looking for something specific, because they already know it. (Male, religious, pre-1981)

The mutual correspondence between family and school is particularly stressful for this type of person, since in the end they risk belonging to the community. The great fear, therefore, is that the school emblem of the community does not accept the child. It is chosen by tradition, that is, it is almost not chosen.

> To be honest, when I looked for a school for my two children, I didn't really look. I only applied to [traditional Catholic school], because I felt that was the school where they had to be. It was basically because of the experiences of my brothers and my husband in [schools of the Catholic congregation traditionally linked to the Chilean upper class]. (Woman, religious, pre-1981)

From this perspective, schools are differentiated between those that build strong communities and form certain values, and those that only promote individual success, whether academic or economic. In fact, this electorate can have variants of very sharp criticism of socioeconomic inequality, or focus on a central consideration of "values" before "success." Thus, this perspective has a distance from the market ethic, often marked by a social discourse, heir to the social-Christian ideology, or by traditional values.

In addition, a particular aversion is manifested towards neoconservatism, expressed in orders such as Opus Dei or the Legionaries of Christ. The denial of the new Catholic conservatism is a fundamental element of identity of the traditional communitarian voter, because this "other" appears as a condemnable combination of fundamentalism and the pursuit of individual success, especially economic. Even neoconservatism is rejected more vehemently than high-performance public education, which, as has been said so far, is not perceived as competition by the upper class.

> Just as I tell you that I would not put my son in the [post-1981 neoconservative Catholic school], because I do not like Opus Dei because they are closed, because I do not like how it works, I would not put my daughter to death in the [traditional academically selective public high school], because I consider that children are not given values. (Woman, religious, post 1981)

In any case, this type of voter has a relevant consideration about the academic, which works as a basis for the later projection. However, this is not the axis of education, nor does it explain the behavior of the elector.

The Neoconservative Communitarian Variant. The neoconservative communitarian voter also chooses a school in search of belonging to a community, but this is a different community: an "upper elite", socioeconomically more restricted, inspired by the "true Catholicism" (carried by religious congregations such as the mentioned), constituted in opposition to that of traditional schools and with them, to the social segment they represent. It is perceived that such an environment has lost its former virtue, is becoming more heterogeneous, less predictable and of lower demands and discipline. This is thematized as fear or rejection of the growing bullying, the "new rich", and the loss of control in the socialization dynamics of children and young people.

> What we expected as a Catholic school (…) was that the environment would be that all the families were Catholic, and it wasn't, you know, there were many families who had not been married in church, that the children were not baptized. (Woman, religious, post 1981)

Explicitly organized to face these challenges, these new schools have replaced the traditional ones in the perception of neoconservative voters, because they have developed the effective capacity to reproduce community, to intertwine with the family and to educate in values; the others promise it, but they do not fulfill it. In fact, the rest of the educational offer is invisible to them, including public schools, which they do not even mention.

> (Answering to other schools): "No, we never thought about it, because they were not Catholic, they were not an alternative, in any way. I know very Catholic people from [traditional school], but it was not an alternative... What happens is that you know the schools within which your friends move, and besides I live in this area, so I don't go to other parts of Santiago much." (Woman, religious, post 1981)

The community as an idea of totality finds its concretion in the family as particularity: the community is a large family; the family is a small community. There is little space for the individual in an enlightened or modern sense. From this perspective, the school prolongs the family and it is this cohesion between family and school based on values that is the normative foundation for the orientation towards individual success. Thus, academic achievement acquires a social meaning, becoming an element of identity for the new schools, a demonstration that there is nothing in the traditional schools that they do not have. It resonates with the idea of "virtue" that Weber found in the Protestant ethic as the basis of capitalism (Weber, 2003). Neoconservatism thus reconciles an orientation towards academic success, with all the forms of rationalization that this implies, with a coherent discipline and a normative intertwining between family and school. It is the dominant sector of the Chilean upper class that, while embracing market neoliberalism, defends the moral conservatism of orthodox Catholicism (S. Madrid, 2016; Thumala, 2007).

Finally, another important distinction with traditional communitarianism is the irrelevance or absence of a "social" discourse, a concern for inequality or for the segmentation of society and schools; it does not appear as a religious feeling of guilt.

The Enlightened-Modern Voter. The enlightened-modern voter chooses a school considering it an essential space in the constitution of the son/daughter as an autonomous individual. Such responsibility is not exhausted in the family, it is projected to society and then to the school. There is distance from communitarian visions, especially their more conservative versions, especially religious ones. In short, more than on the family/community axis, this voter operates on the individual/society distinction. It is thus possible to identify the echoes of the meritocratic narrative and the valuation of a certain social diversity perceived, of course, within the narrow limits of the Chilean upper class, as has already been documented (S. Madrid, 2016).

> I think my daughter's school is a school where diversity is paramount, that is, a school where there is a lot of respect for classmates, for beliefs, for what they are. I think that is a notable difference with other schools. I think all kinds of people go to my daughter's school: children of teachers, many foreigners, also people with a lot of money, but also children of professionals. The idea is that children are more autonomous. (Woman, secular, pre-1981)

The absence of a community affiliation means that the choice of school is not pre-written and is actually an active choice, of search and comparison of options. An integral educational project is sought, which includes outstanding academic performance, although without the success-obsessed expression in the rankings. The importance of the English language is more prominent, which is related to the concerns of the professional classes. Of course, although the outlook on children emphasizes their own freedom of choice, non-university destinations are not mentioned: their freedom is constrained to the type of professional they want to be. A mother interviewed makes it clear: "good careers in good universities." More than community reproduction, it is important to ensure the professional destiny of the children. The noted individualism is thus combined with the drive for class reproduction, viable with an average performance in the legitimate schools of this social sector.

> To be honest, it was a gamble for me, but I'm more and more convinced that it was the best decision. I liked the system in which they reinforce the girls' self-esteem a lot. It is a school where I care that my daughter comes out as a leader, even if it is not the best school academically in the rankings. That is why we chose it. I feel at ease with the decision, because I know that we are giving them tools so that they can do what they want later. They will have a good academic, personality, and contact base. They will be leaders, as I told you. And with that they can do whatever they want well. (Woman, religious, pre-1981)

> Schools (always private, high-cost, without public subsidy) are ordered according to such criteria: they prefer secular institutions, they can be colonial or even religious, but not dogmatic. It is interesting to note that religious schools are not discarded, but they are not valued for their religious character but educational. If a religious school is attractive, a mother interviewed points out pragmatically: "What does it cost one to get a prayer?" (Woman, religious, pre-1981).

Public education is clearly segmented into two categories for these voters. On the one hand, there are a few traditional academic public schools, which they know and respect, but they are not seen as an alternative for their own children, given their supposed exclusive focus on academic achievement and excessive peer competition. Public schools, on the other hand, are completely outside of their elective range. There is a perception of the public as focused on the poor, in a naturalization of the subsidiary nature of the State. The apparent contradiction between a perspective with meritocratic resonances and the self-exclusion of public education is addressed by a mother when she says "it is good to do one's duty to the country, but not with your child" (Woman, religious, pre-1981); expressing the conflict analyzed by van Zanten (2007) between being a good parent or a good citizen. In other words, these voters find in high-cost private schools the traditional values of selective and quality public education.

> In that universe of secular schools [names traditional academically selective public schools], I believe that they are indeed interesting and attractive, but they are focused only on results, which is not what I am looking for. However, I do not want to

> diminish the fact that there are a lot of people who go to those schools because they cannot afford private schools and who eventually do well. For example, the son of my grandmother's maid, with a lot of effort, entered [the "emblematic" public school], studied business engineering, and is a professional. (Man, secular, post-1981)

The relative distance that some of these voters manifest with respect to the excessive academic one-dimensionality, which they perceive is a good part of the dominant education in the country, is well connected with their willingness to significantly modulate the educational prospective children by virtue of their particular characteristics.

> Many schools have appeared for different capacities, today it is clear that not all schools are for all children and not all children are for all schools, so there are schools with another kind of worldview, do you understand me? (Woman, lay, post 1981)

The certainty of belonging to the upper class allows them to relativize instrumental considerations about education as "capital" for social mobility (omnipresent in other social segments), so that the diversity of abilities and interests gives rise to horizontal qualitative differentiations, emerging "multiple intelligences" as legitimate domains to develop in education. In fact, there is a small market in Chile for upper-class schools ("There are no cheap schools that are personalized," Woman, secular, post 1981) with alternative pedagogical philosophies, such as Waldorf and Montessori. The dilemma with the children arises when the parents, imbued with these enlightened and meritocratic values, do not find them in their children, giving rise in them to certain anomic behavior, disinterest in their own development or lack of meaning. It is also through this route—in addition to psychological therapy—that non-traditional school paths emerge as their best alternative.

Conclusions

This study explored the meaning that school choice has for Chilean upper-class families. As we have seen, the upper class has a community-oriented view of the school as a key link to an identity environment, determined by its socio-cultural meaning; in that sense, rather than choice based on rational comparison, self-classification based on a sense of belonging is produced. Of course, there is a rich diversity of educational projects, which are perceived as being of similar quality, although academic performance is relegated to the background; it is not that it does not matter, but rather that it is considered given, as a floor: it is almost always overwhelmingly superior to the national average, thus enabling—if required—belonging to the dominant sectors. This dynamic is perceived as a long-standing trait, as the communities and their identities in question have deep roots in the dominant sectors. Of course, we have also identified a "modern enlightened" voter who does not feel part of a tradition or linked to a community, but who still seeks complex educational projects and is limited to options that keep him segregated within the upper class. However, linked to recent modernization, there are processes of change that produce a greater heterogeneity of the upper sectors, followed by the reaction to close the communities, either in their traditional voice or in new dynamics that are perceived as of high elite (connoting not only great wealth, but power, property and social closure).

These findings stimulate their discussion and sociological interpretation in three axes: the problem of social closure in education and its character in the upper sectors, the effect that this could have on academic performance, and the consequences in the family-school relationship.

One issue is the defense of the well-to-do groups against the effects of a modernization that they themselves drive towards the rest of society. The liquidity of social ties under the guise of advanced neoliberalism is the flip side of the struggle to make them even stronger in the upper layers. The very expansion of what in a generic sense can be called the upper-middle class (a sign of post-industrial maturation of the occupational structure) is seen with suspicion and a greater social seclusion of the upper layers is legitimized, so that the meritocratic incorporation to the elite is very reduced in Chile. Thus, the main voice of the families and subjects investigated does not strengthen the secular mechanisms of differentiation, such as money and performance, but community belonging, as described by Madrid (2016) and studied its discriminatory effect in the labor market by Núñez & Miranda (2010). Social differentiation (well analyzed by Espinoza, Barozet & Méndez, 2013; Méndez & Gayo, 2018; Ruiz Encina & Boccardo, 2014) driven by the polarity described between the high-income professional (but who continues to live from his work) and the high elite, stimulates the need for distinction between communities, but this is not organized according to academic performance, nor through a competitive market that pushes down prices, so that the private schools of the upper class are not particularly pressured to produce outstanding results or to be efficient. It is the educational manifestation of the weak modern character of the Latin American dominant sectors to which we have referred.

Could this be related to the low academic level of Chilean upper-class schools? We believe so. As is known, in international school performance assessments (PISA, TIMSS) and adult (IALS-PIAAC), the Chilean upper class obtains comparatively mediocre results in absolute terms and even more so taking into account the resources it has, even falling below an average student of the countries with the best performance and the group that obtains excellent results at the international level is practically non-existent. These findings are consistent with the evidence mentioned above about the greater relevance of social capital over academic achievement in the labor market of the dominant sector, as a factor that facilitates the intergenerational transmission of economic capital in these sectors in Chile. In other words, without the pressure of a genuine meritocracy based on educational performance and sheltered in community belonging networks from school to work, the Chilean upper class reproduces itself in a parallel socio-educational circuit (Valenzuela, Bellei, & de los Ríos, 2014), to which, of course, the market rules promoted for the "95% below" do not apply.

By the way, we have also identified a certain diversity within the upper class, which is the basis for the formation of strongly endogamous family-school communities. In its main voice, community values refer to traditional, sacred or ethnic principles as the basis of formation, with secular or enlightened culture (which a secondary voice promotes in these sectors) appearing as a danger of disintegration. Thus, the school is called to shield the adolescent-family bond, not to break it to open the children to the social world, as the traditional functionalism of an enlightened base professed. Even the neo-communal defense of academic performance, more than the basis for a meritocratic culture, is a sign of success, of confirmation of the elitist character that is possessed in the struggle for intra-upper class legitimacy. Hence the lack of interest in establishing relationships with even wider high-performing school environments, even with other fractions of the dominant sectors, let alone those of the public sector. Certainly, the different valuation within the upper class of traditional universities of academic excellence as a place of training for the professional elite, versus the preference for socioeconomically elitist universities that appear as a community continuity of their schools (Orellana, 2017), marks this internal heterogeneity of the Chilean upper class.

Finally, as a third axis of discussion, it would be relevant to study in more detail the transformations that the family-school relationship experiences in the upper sectors. To the extent that the described polarization tensions families and communities to more intense closures, it increases the stress of parents and the demands on children. The family-school relationship is rationalized and sophisticated, especially in the selective admission processes, by virtue of not only

economic and academic considerations, but also psychological tests, admission tests of different kinds (even at preschool age), the requirement of new family background (including family photos), and the latency of the threat of expulsion, to name a few. In many cases, these are flagrant discriminations and arbitrariness against children and families, exercised by schools given their dominant position in this field as we have analyzed. In fact, families resent these processes (there must not be many other social spaces in Chile where the upper class is subjected to such severe scrutiny), but they feel obliged to submit to them, without even the guarantees of consumer rights, ratifying that in the education of the upper class the market is not the regulatory principle.

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