

Dilemmas in the Portuguese School in the Face of the Foreigner Who Arrives to Stay

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ABSTRACT – Dilemmas in the Portuguese School in the Face of the Foreigner Who Arrives to Stay^I. Based on empirical data produced through interviews with foreign students enrolled in Portuguese schools, the article follows pragmatic sociologies to explore the diversity of ways of getting involved at school in making the common plural. We conclude that the inclusion of students is a daily exercise that depends on establishing bonds of friendship. Accommodating the novelty brought by foreigners in school environments is made up of tense moments, requiring constant situational (re)adjustments to overcome the difficulties experienced in terms of their permanence in the schooling processes underway.

Keywords: Foreign. School. Dilemmas. Inclusion.

RESUMO – Dilemas na Escola Portuguesa Face ao Estrangeiro que Chega para Permanecer. Partindo de dados empíricos produzidos através da realização de entrevistas junto de alunos estrangeiros matriculados em escolas portuguesas, o artigo segue as sociologias pragmáticas para explorar a diversidade de modalidades de envolvimento na escola no fazer plural do comum. Conclui-se que a inclusão dos alunos é um exercício quotidiano e que depende do estabelecimento de laços de amizade. A acomodação da novidade trazida pelo estrangeiro nos meios escolares é composta de momentos de tensão, carecendo de constantes (re)ajustes situacionais para superar as dificuldades experienciadas no que toca à sua permanência nos processos de escolarização em curso.

Palavras-chave: Estrangeiro. Escola. Dilemas. Inclusão.

Migrating to Stay: The School Barometer

Europe is once again experiencing moments of social and political upheaval. Historically, the continent has undergone cycles of unrest which, in different periods – whether prolonged or brief – have resulted in collective unease capable of displacing conflict beyond the physical realm. The recurrence of such states of social instability across various European regions makes the presentation of specific examples unnecessary, even though there are significant variations in the intensity and consequences of these phenomena.

Periods of calm have always been punctuated by others that form their opposite. Conversely, the same is also true. In this sense, European political modernity may not have been shaped by a history composed merely of *disjunctive* events, experiences, and situations, or, as Genard and Cantelli (2008) now suggest, by *conjunctive* ones resulting from changes in anthropological perceptions of what it means to be human today. The constitutive aspect of being human does not preclude the individual from first being a being who *exists* – even if this condition in Europe, as likely in other geographies, experiences alternating rhythms in the feeling of inclusion in the environment alongside otherness, with the loss of that inclusion either perceived by the individual or by others, whether near or distant, who signal these shifting rhythms.

Perhaps today, Europeans experience these dynamics alongside other disruptions, marked by the agitation brought by those who have traveled from afar in search of a safe haven within this cartography. This gives rise to a sense of deprivation of inclusion – one in which the experience of being with oneself and with others, through whom tangible or virtual forms of identification are exchanged, becomes intertwined with beings who carry other environments, affecting the native population by introducing rhythms whose alternations evoke a sense of strangeness (Bidet, 2007).

There is no doubt that the accelerating pace of migration since the beginning of the new millennium has brought new challenges to European political modernity – a phenomenon that, although framed and perceived as new, is perhaps not so new after all. Both external and internal European migrations have accompanied the continent's political history. What now takes on greater prominence may be the more intense and broader search for European territory and environments by individuals from more distant cartographies – further facilitated by changes in transcontinental transportation, which have significantly reduced the perceived distance. However, this does not mean that the relationship between *departure* and *arrival* follows a continuous and linear pattern, or that the same ingredients are always present – whether when comparing different periods of migration to Europe or from Europe to other continents. Attending to the rhythmic compositions of these movements requires an approach of caution and precision (Breviglieri, 2017).

Still, that is not the purpose of this reflection. Our focus lies elsewhere, namely, in highlighting the *rhythmic symbioses of displacements*, of these mobilities wrapped in large-scale numbers, and their consequences for the “environmental compositions between those who are arriving with the intention to stay and those who have long been settled” and who observe the newcomers, whether through direct affectations, mediated influences within networks, or even through efforts to avoid being touched by these convivial experiences (Stavo-Debauge, 2014, 2015).

It is worth noting that among the settled natives, there are individuals born in countries where they acquired a nationality different from that of their parents or grandparents. This new nationality may or may not be combined with their ancestors’ nationality of origin. Considering the blending of *identity markers* among natives introduces into political experience a different playing field, in which the combinations are multiple, marked by footprints carrying traces of other paths, often winding ones (Breviglieri, 2010). And from these generationally transmitted experiential sinuosity, various feelings and affectations must be acknowledged, ranging from *nostalgia* between worlds of origin and destination, which, though distinct, are not devoid of the desire to reconfigure them, despite the challenges of making them identical; that is, of retrieving and applying memories from the place of origin, memories more or less entangled, blurred, or even clouded by temporalities that can no longer be reversed, no matter how well they are thought to be preserved.

Navigating multiple times and spaces that are part of these trajectories’ histories – ingredients constitutive of these individuals’ existence – triggers effects that do not always bring them peace. The moments and situations they go through cause them to oscillate between having their “eyes closed” and “eyes open” (Thévenot, 2006). Certainly, the tensions each one carries in their corporeality are not exclusive to the native population. These questions also inhabit the bodies of those who arrive and wish to stay, regardless of the timing of their arrival and whether their stay is accompanied by the aspiration to add a newly acquired nationality to the one they brought with them. In all cases, and as a result of their transactions with the environment and with the beings they connect with, there are always concerns of varying geometries. In this sense, they continuously experience situations where their eyes are open, closed, or half-shut, depending on the problems they encounter.

In the multiple arrangements that one can imagine and outline, or even in those that are difficult to predict or conjecture, the fact remains that, between action and experience, corporealities and their concrete existences are constantly affected by unrest. That is, it must be considered that these individuals act within *uncertain* worlds (Ogien, 2014; Quéré, 2006). And this uncertainty becomes more pronounced when, in the relationship between *acting* and *undergoing* (Breviglieri, 2017; Dewey, 1958; Stavo-Debauge, 2012), their organic experiences with the environments to which they are connected appear

extensive or laden with significant content that nourishes them. At such times, rhythms vary, and even during moments of apparent calm, movement continues to occur—always leaving open the possibility that states of alert may return with fluctuating, even unstable, intensity.

As daily life is animated by movements with these properties, endowing individuals with qualities that manifest in their ways of acting, especially during more visceral moments of confrontation, it follows that the school institution is not immune to such dynamics. It is marked by various *dilemmas* arising from the coexistence of students from different nationalities and those who have been there for a longer time (Resende, 2019). Regardless of the national context, these tensions can also be observed in schools, precisely through the experiences that affect students (both national and foreign) in their interactions, or, at the limit, when such affectations are actively avoided by either side.

That said, the school setting is an excellent barometer for reflecting on the issues brought by the *newcomer* whose intention is to *remain* within it. The value of this text lies in highlighting the presence of the new within the existence of the being who arrives from another country.

Attributing this quality of "newness" to the newcomer does not exclude them from other conditions. Indeed, the characterization of the "other" spans a broader spectrum. However, narrowing this scope is advisable here in order to provide an analytical focus, a zoomed-in framing. The central objective of this text is to unravel the tensions, dilemmas, and controversies that may arise between those who appear in the school setting in the figure of the foreigner and the others, as they attempt to coordinate their actions in concrete situations.

To that end, we start from the understanding that it is within school that students are schooled. If the practices promoted by schooling aim to gratify and benefit its users, it is also true that they demand sacrifice and suffering from all involved, especially from the newcomer. These students are confronted with a process which, although grounded in forms and contents that may be recognizable to those who have experienced school in their country of origin, quickly reveals differences, whether in organizational dynamics, or in pedagogical and didactic practices (in terms of knowledge, its transmission, evaluation processes, etc.), or in the multiple dynamics supported by a variety of interactions occurring in the classroom, during recess, and in other internal spaces such as cafeterias, school bars, libraries, sports halls, etc., as well as in the surrounding environment (Breviglieri, 2007).

It is in this sense that the school – and the schooling it provides – intervenes in the *bodies* of students on both cognitive and educational levels. In both national and foreign students, but especially in their convivial interactions, their corporealities express, through what they are capable of doing, experiences that arise from their active engagements with the school environments. From these connections emerge movements with rhythms that may be either harmonious or dissonant.

Doing and Experiencing Inclusion in School: An Unfinished and Encompassing Process

Focusing analytically on the political socialization produced by these experimentations and encounters with the new leads us to conceive of the school as a political arena. However, it is a particular kind of *public arena* (Resende & Dionísio, 2005; Cefai & Pasquier, 2003). Within it coexist individuals of different ages—and therefore at varying stages of maturity, as well as differing genders and ethnic backgrounds. It is also important to note that Portuguese public schools enroll students from diverse social classes and origins.

In any case, even during adolescence, these experiences serve as moments of political learning, that is, as a meticulous or incidental preparation for future engagement with the “adult world.” It should be noted that the political experimentations occurring in school, and resulting from the multiple interactions experienced there, always combine – through variable configurations – the *conjunctive* and *disjunctive* dimensions that characterize contemporary political modernity: the preservation of difference within the common, and the construction of the common within plurality, are two sides of the same coin, the minting of which is never guaranteed (Pattaroni, 2015). Consequently, one cannot overlook the existence of moments of suffering in which humanity – particularly the humanity of those who arrive at school from abroad – may be experienced as *suspended*, reducing them to the status of what remains: their existence as living beings. The boundaries between being *alive* and being *human*, in addition to being porous, are far from constituting a definitive achievement; they require a constant practical exercise, situated, relational, and embodied. It is through the examination of these mobile, contingent, and uncertain boundaries that *inclusion* can be assessed: certainly not in binary terms (inclusion–exclusion), nor based on stable properties (such as nationality), but rather as the result of “plural and variable compositions arising from different levels and registers of participation and engagement in the course of action,” depending on each particular situation (Thévenot, 2014).

All these experiences – whether verbalized or expressed through silence – give rise to sensations that resonate within students’ bodies at varying rhythms, either through nervous undulations that course through their bodies, agitating them, or through states of apathy that, though not necessarily leading to inactivity, result in an avoidance of engagement as *participants* in certain interactions with their peers. When consequences emerge that cause them to withdraw, these retreats may appear as lethargy, a desire to “keep to themselves,” absorbing hostilities in solitude or with the support of other peers who show signs of having undergone similar experiences.

It should be noted that the consideration of these scenarios does not stem from either unrealism or randomness. Their possibility has been tangible, arising from observations carried out since 2004 in various schools located across municipalities from the north to the south

of Portugal². Thus, while such behaviors were previously noted among native students from different social and territorial backgrounds, their ethnic origins also contributed to understanding actions with the meanings previously described.

Whereas in the past, the dilemmas and tensions associated with *various forms of estrangement* stemmed from situated experiences expressed by national adolescent and young students, it now seems necessary – given the growing number of enrollments of foreign students across the three cycles of Basic Education and in Secondary Education – to shift the focus to the newcomer from abroad and to explore the effects of their presence and actions within the school environment.

Certainly, the figure of the newcomer entering a given school is not exclusive to those arriving through migratory processes, regardless of the continent from which they and their family come. There continue to be national students who transfer from one school to another. The reasons for such mobility are manifold. Among many, the one most relevant to the reflections we have been developing relates to the transition between cycles of study, specifically, when students complete Basic Education and enter Secondary Education. The pertinence of this criterion lies in the effects of age-related transitions from adolescence to youth, which vary, for instance, between female and male students, but also present specificities among certain students, particularly those nearing the end of this final cycle of compulsory education. The same applies to students of ethnic origin, with the added challenge if their educational trajectories have already been marked by experiences perceived as exclusionary.

Moreover, during this final stretch of schooling, before entering Higher Education, the labor market, or other forms of complementary training, students are faced with assessments of a different nature than those they had previously encountered. The ways in which they handle these assessments – whether in virtual or tangible contexts – are shaped by what troubles them, unsettles them, or what they criticize within the school. Standardizing those assessments does not flatten them, nor does it neutralize their potential effects. On the contrary, it may heighten their intensity, especially when students are put to the test through confrontations in which they become involved or to which they become committed as a result. Avoiding, committing to, or becoming randomly involved in such confrontations are actions that may or may not be shaped by tactical or more calculated behavior. What is less common are actions in which students engage within a "planned regime" (Thévenot, 2006), governed by rationalities grounded, for example, in the notion of a personal project.

What is more commonly observed, instead, is that the degree of students' engagement in action (with the environment and with others) depends on how they are *affected* by the tensions and anxieties they experience: sometimes felt just beneath the surface, manifesting as irritation; at other times, through verbal expressions of indignation; and not infrequently, through displays of relative indifference or even

deliberate detachment. Now, when events occur that cause them physical or emotional harm, whether because they do not understand what is happening, are caught off guard by the situation, or are targeted due to the emotional impact that certain incidents have on them and, by extension, on others, particularly their friends at school, their level of involvement tends to become more pronounced.

It is evident that these embodied sensitivities affect not only students already familiar with the environments shaped by schooling practices, but also those who are newly arrived and unfamiliar with everything. They are unaware of the existence and functioning of the school infrastructures into which they have been inserted, which is why they do not always elicit the desired sense of *hospitality* (Stavo-Debauge, 2019). They do not recognize themselves in the assigned classes because their peers have not yet bonded with them. They express feelings of being lost, without reference points to help them navigate environments that remain nebulous, as they wander through them without calibrated bearings (Resende et al., 2014). And when these experiences carry a deeply distressing emotional charge, feelings of *saudade* (longing or nostalgia) intensify, and memories of school life in the countries from which they emigrated to Portugal become more vivid. *Corporeality*, *affectivity*, and *rhythm* are therefore key elements for understanding the tonalities and the political and moral contours of the convivial relationships established within the public arena of the school. Consequently, a sociological understanding of the inclusion of those who arrive intending to stay must not overlook the *aesthetic* and *affective* dimension of their experiences, especially in situations where verbal communication, due to language differences, is not easily achieved.

All these experiences continue to permeate school life and schooling. The changes in school morphology, driven by the growing number of students from both transcontinental and European migratory backgrounds, continue to insert into the machinery of inclusion new sequences and conditions that challenge and destabilize schools, even during moments when public action seems to suggest that calm is finally about to emerge. Contrary to the legitimate aspirations of public policies aimed at including all students within the school, the massive arrival of foreign students puts these institutions to the test, at times excessively, at others unexpectedly. In fact, the continuous flow of migrant families arriving in Portugal has surpassed all forecasts made by public agencies³.

. It is in this sense that the “arts of making the common in the plural” within Portuguese schools (Resende, 2013; Resende & Gouveia, 2013) continue to be challenged by new *trials* (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991; Lemieux, 2011), in light of the emergence of problems that have demanded new ways of questioning and thinking about the newcomer to the educational institution. Whereas in the past the figure of the guest was already meaningful, particularly in schools with a more visibly diverse social composition, notably those with students of Roma origin or from Portuguese-speaking African countries, today these

compositions take on new tonalities, including ethnic ones, as the multiplicity of students of foreign origin adds additional references to those already present.

Far from being negligible for a country that, until a few decades ago, was primarily a country of emigration, the increasing number of immigrants in schools already reveals a noteworthy turning point, one that invites us to study how students are welcomed into their educational institutions and the empirical challenges that accompany this process. Coincidentally, this shift coincides with the 50th anniversary of the re-founding of Portuguese democracy. Its commemoration takes place at a time of changes in schooling and, consequently, transformations in processes of political socialization. The democratic experience within schools necessarily involves this encounter with the 'new other', represented by the foreign student, who must find within the school environment welcoming spaces. These spaces constitute important tests amid the challenges and confrontations that arise between those who arrive intending to stay and those who have long secured their place, despite the different tonalities of their acclimatization.

How are these newcomers' incursions into school life experienced? Are they perceived as untimely or unwelcome entries, either by those expecting them or by those taken by surprise by their sudden arrival? How do those who arrive feel in response to the reception given by natives who have yet to bond with them as peers?

Giving Protagonism to Empirical Data

The Arrival of the Newcomer at School: experienced difficulties

The arrival of foreign students into the school arena raises a myriad of questions concerning the forms of sociability already established there, both among students themselves and between students and other figures who inhabit the school setting. The construction of the common (in the plural) is a necessary condition not only for the school to fulfill its mandated goals of learning and civic education, but also to provide students with a positive and enriching experience. Yet the "common" is far from being a definitive or guaranteed achievement; rather, it requires a continuous process of adjustment and readjustment in the coordination of collective action.

Now, the arrival of the newcomer challenges those modes of coordination and participation in the common that are already in practice among native students, as it brings with it novelty and unpredictability, elements that must be accommodated within school conviviality. This initial impact is mentioned by all the young people interviewed. Indeed, they report a variety of difficulties they experienced firsthand during their early days in the Portuguese school system, regardless of whether they have since overcome them or not.

One of the main difficulties mentioned concerns the very *process of learning* the content taught. Jordana⁴ is Brazilian and, at the time of the interview, had been in Portugal for one month. Nevertheless, that

was sufficient time for her to note that she “feels a great deal of difficulty.” As she puts it, “with the subjects, I feel like I’m from another world, like I’m in a very intelligent world [...]. And I end up feeling kind of different.” Jordana draws a comparison between the education system in her country of origin and in her host country to explain her learning delay in relation to her peers: “I arrived and the teacher said, ‘So, what topic were you studying back in Brazil?’ and I didn’t even know how to say which topic I had stopped at. Because there, we don’t really have that level of... [...], it’s not that clear.” The student perceives the teaching style in Portugal as unfamiliar. As a result, she says, “I feel a bit out of place in terms of the content, when they teach it, and I’m like, ‘they practically know everything,’ and I’m lost.” The vocabulary she uses – “out of place,” “lost” – is striking and clearly signals the obstacles the student experiences.

Consider the case of Kizua⁵: in Angola, where he is originally from, “I studied at a [...] very good private school.” Upon arriving in Portugal and enrolling in a public school, he quickly realized “that it was different.” Referring to his current school, he notes, “in terms of teaching, it’s much better. Back in Angola, I used to get top marks. I was the best in my class.” Kizua has no doubt that education in Portugal is more demanding, presenting challenges he was not used to facing. But this is not solely due to the level of academic rigor: “what complicated things the most for me was Geography, because everything was different. Over there, we talked about our provinces, our things, and everything else.” The administrative organization of Portuguese territory differs from that of Angola, exposing the student to a vocabulary – district, municipality, parish, etc. – that, while familiar to Portuguese students, is unfamiliar to him. Vítor⁶, a Brazilian student, makes a similar comparison:

The difference between this school [in Portugal] and the schools I attended in Brazil is, I think it’s practically everything. Both in terms of teaching, which here is much more demanding, much more focused on the subject. In Brazil, things are very superficial, because there are many more subjects.

According to the student, education in Portugal is more specific and in-depth, whereas in Brazil a broader range of subjects is covered. Another difficulty frequently mentioned by the interviewees is the *language barrier*. Singh⁷, a Pakistani student, is clear on this point:

The classes were conducted in Portuguese. Of course, I couldn’t understand anything... Imagine the situation—being in a class where you don’t understand anything that’s being said. [...]. Most of my classmates don’t speak English, or maybe they just don’t want to talk to me, I’m still not sure. [...]. That makes communication and integration into the class very difficult.

Because he does not speak the native language, Singh can only communicate in English. However, as he points out, not all teachers “can speak English very well,” nor, for that matter, can his classmates. As a result, the student finds himself unable, on the one hand, to understand the content being taught, which hinders learning, and, on the other hand, to interact with his peers, which makes it difficult to form social bonds and, consequently, to achieve “integration into the class.”

The issue of language and communication affects various tasks expected of students, as is the case for Maryam⁸, an Iranian student:

The math teacher told me I would have to take a final exam in the subject. So she gave me a website to practice, but the worksheets are in Portuguese. I've been using Google Translate. Then I asked the teacher where I could find the English version of the exams. She told me it didn't exist.

As a result, the student is not fully equipped to study at home, which makes it more difficult to achieve good academic performance.

Even students who speak Portuguese report this issue. The different language variants create communication barriers, not only in terms of assessing learning, but also in forming connections and friendships. Jordana notes that "they [her classmates] make fun" of her Carioca accent, imitating it. Roberta⁹, also Brazilian, tells us that she had several foreign friends of different nationalities, explaining that she identified with them because they were also mocked for the way they spoke: "they made fun of how the person talked. The way they spoke [...]. Yes, the pronunciation. Things like that." Roberta feels, in such situations, that she is the target of ridicule and mockery: "some [classmates] pick on us. And pretend they don't understand, and so on." Due to the discomfort these situations cause her, and given that she has been in Portugal for 11 years, Roberta takes precautions by adapting as closely as possible to the Portuguese spoken in Portugal: "I learned that, to keep people from making fun of me, I had to be like the others, I had to speak [European Portuguese] to go more unnoticed."

Others, like Kizua, take the attention their accent draws in good humor: "my accent is more Angolan than Portuguese. Yes, so at first, they even laughed at my accent. I didn't feel offended. But there are some who do feel offended and respond with aggression." Acknowledging that not everyone reacts well to jokes about language, the student adds that, in his case, "I even start joking around with them [the classmates]." Natula views the issue differently: "there are people who laugh at [her] accent." And on that note, she confides:

Sometimes I feel bad. But sometimes I don't, because I have to be proud of who I am and where I come from. Because the accent doesn't matter, the color doesn't matter, nothing matters. And the people where I grew up talk like this. [...] But sometimes I really do get very upset.

The student "feels bad" and gets "upset" because she feels that her way of speaking and communicating becomes a target of mockery.

It becomes clear that students are affected – each in different ways and to varying degrees – by their Portuguese peers' reactions to their speech, generating moments of tension that are not without consequences. In these situations, each of these young people responds differently: Roberta makes efforts to adjust her way of speaking to match the native accent; Kizua joins in jovially and playfully with the comments made about him; and Natula draws on her origins (of which she is proud) to counterbalance the discomfort she feels.

The feeling of being included also encounters other forms of resistance related to the strangeness of the novelty brought by those who arrive at school. First and foremost, the image conveyed by the body

and the first impression it makes on those who are already well integrated into the school. As Vítor states, “when you see groups, really large groups, you can tell: that one is Brazilian, that one is something else. You can tell them apart.” How? The student explains: “by the way they behave, the way they talk, I think that’s really it.” Singh is direct on this matter:

Some classmates don’t want to be seen with us. I notice it. Sometimes I’m with a classmate, and when others come near, he moves away. [...] Is it that they’re ashamed? Our clothing is poor, and many of us wear turbans, which seems to make some people uncomfortable.

The perceived image of the other’s body, beginning with the clothing worn, often produces a sense of strangeness. And, frequently, that strangeness leads to distancing and avoidance. Alternatively, it results in the formation of friendship groups composed exclusively of foreign students, as reported by Vichitra¹⁰, an Indian student: “we usually stay in groups with other Indians or Pakistanis. Almost all the other classmates keep away from us.” The explanation he offers aligns with what has been discussed: “I think they are afraid of us because we are different—for example, we wear different clothes, we have religious commitments.” In this case, the sense of strangeness is also rooted in *religious beliefs and practices*. Tuqeer¹¹, a Pakistani student, shares a similar experience, reflecting deeply on the avoidance by both classmates and even teachers: “It’s really scary. It feels like everyone looks at us in a strange way. [...]. Do I inspire fear or disgust? I really used to think that, and it’s very uncomfortable. And it wasn’t just the classmates, I felt the same with some teachers.” Faced with his peers’ gazes and the distance they impose, the student feels “uncomfortable” and questions whether there is something wrong with him.

It is worth noting that even Martim¹², a Portuguese student with direct Chinese ancestry, says he was “mocked” for “being the son of a Chinese father” – a lineage his classmates identified through his facial features – leaving him feeling “bad” and “uncomfortable.” Novelty is perceived both sensorily and visually, impressions that guide the situated conduct of young people. Natula highlights the difficulty this creates in forming social connections: “for example, when it’s lunchtime. They invite each other, they go have lunch together, go do things. Go hang out. But with me and Bruna, they don’t do that.” Moreover, the sense of strangeness is neither unidirectional nor unilateral, of course. Those who arrive also experience strangeness in relation to those who are, after all, new to them, the natives. Kizua offers an interesting example of the strangeness he felt: “what surprised me most is that the girls here wear whatever clothes they want. [...]. In Angola, it’s basically always hot. [...]. Even in that weather, they’re required to wear trousers at school—and here it’s not like that.”

In sum, we have outlined some of the difficulties faced by foreign students upon arriving at Portuguese schools, related to learning, communication, and socialization with peers (and teachers). We have also highlighted how these young people are affected by such forms of re-

sistance, reporting feelings of apprehension, exclusion, self-consciousness, isolation, discomfort, or unease. Yet, we have also begun to observe the emergence of plural ways of accommodating the new within school conviviality. Therefore, in the following section, we will focus on the importance of peer group reception and the establishment of bonds of friendship, emphasizing the central role of hospitality practices in enabling participation and inclusion of newcomers within the fabric of the school common (Resende, 2019).

Hospitality Toward the New: welcoming, integrating, befriending

All the students interviewed agree that school is both a space for acquiring knowledge essential for preparing to enter the professional world, and a place for interaction, socialization, and friendship (Resende, 2013). As Igor¹³, a Moldovan student, puts it, “it doesn’t make sense to be at school and not have any friends,” and he even changed schools “because of the environment,” since “having good friends, good people around you is also very important for the school journey.” Martim agrees, saying that “it’s at school that we make most of our friends, and it’s from there that we build relationships with other people.” In other words, as Vítor tells us, “school is a good way to learn,” but that learning also includes “the content part, the part about making friends, connecting with people, socializing.” For this reason, school, as the student further notes, “is also a matter of integrating into society.” Natula echoes this view, stating that “school is our second home,” and it is there “that we find [...] our true friends.” Therefore, the formation of friendships with peers emerges as a crucial dimension in understanding how the newcomer is accommodated within the organization of the common and participates in the coordination of action with others.

The centrality of friendships in the inclusion of newcomers at school is evident across all interviews. Martim, for example, “think[s] it must have been easier [for his inclusion] to arrive with friends, to feel more at ease.” Why? “Because if I do something a bit unusual, there’s already some acceptance from the people I know. If I didn’t have friends [...] it would be different. Maybe I wouldn’t feel so comfortable, maybe I wouldn’t show myself as much.” Friendships with classmates allow the student to “show himself,” since “it’s important for a friend to be there to listen and, above all, to accept us as we are, almost like a member of the family. [...]. Trust and respect, that’s important.” Establishing affinity and friendly bonds is fundamental because of the “trust,” “acceptance,” “ease,” and “respect” they provide, allowing those who come from outside to participate and express themselves authentically. Friendship helps prevent feelings of isolation and loneliness, always lurking for those who arrive in a place that feels unfamiliar.

These relationships are formed daily and exercised through the bodily, affective, and sensory engagement of the young people. In this process, the hospitality of those already present toward those arriving is essential, as Jordana describes: “there was a day when I stayed off to

the side. Then the two girls who were there called me. ‘No, don’t be afraid, you can come and sit with us.’” The native students took the initiative and made an effort to approach Jordana, who was left alone “in her corner.” Similarly, Natula recalls how her only school friendship began: “it wasn’t my initiative. I was alone, and she came over and asked if we could hang out together. We started hanging out. And I think if she hadn’t done that, we wouldn’t be friends.”

However, initiating dialogue with the newcomer is not the only form of approach. Kizua, for example, identifies sports and participation in recreational activities as facilitators of inclusion: “in the first physical education class, we played football. And since I’m really good at football, they liked watching me play, etc. That’s when they started saying ‘this guy is cool,’” or “here we pretty much play foosball more than anything else.” On the one hand, the appreciation of the young man’s football skills served as an icebreaker for social interaction; on the other hand, the foosball game appears to have provided a shared activity around which interaction unfolded naturally, without requiring verbal conversation.

Friendship relationships – whether within the class or beyond it – sustained through these everyday practices, create a favorable context for the participation of foreign students in the shared life of the school. This begins with academic performance, as Kizua explains: “I can study the subject, I can know the content, but if the question is asked in a different way, I don’t know how to answer. And sometimes I ask them to help me understand the question properly. They tell me.” Natula reinforces this point when speaking about her friend: “she’s the one who sometimes helps me understand things, because the Portuguese from here [Portugal] is different from the Portuguese from there [Angola].” Even though, of course, these bonds go far beyond their practical usefulness, involving deep emotional connections that are essential for staying in school. As Natula puts it: “I think her company is really good. And sometimes, when she’s absent, I feel really sad, really alone. [...] Her presence is very important to me.” The formation of friendly social bonds is so important that, in their absence, it can even lead to the decision to switch classes, as Vítor recounts about a Brazilian friend of his:

That friend of mine [...] was in another class, and he said it was very different from this one [the current one]. He’s now in the same class as me [...]. He said his old class was made up of cliques. [...] So he was left alone, [...] he couldn’t make friends with people—they were very closed off.

And that was reason enough for him to request a class transfer. The organization of the class into closed-off groups makes it difficult for newly arrived students to integrate. As Jordana explains: “If there’s, like, a little group, I feel, I guess it’s not really shame, but fear of stepping in and just showing up out of nowhere. So I feel kind of apprehensive.” Natula agrees: “It’s just the two of us because the other classmates leave us out [...]. Could it be because of my skin color? I would say it’s because of my color.” This “fear” of participating and intervening, along with the feeling of being excluded from the class, reveals the

central role of forming a circle of friends in ensuring a quality school experience. Igor's experience is telling in this regard. Happy with his school environment up to 9th grade, he changed schools in 10th grade. And at that new school, "it was like a family of students who were already integrated into that group." For that reason, he "decided to change schools again," and was transferred to the one he was attending at the time of the interview. His assessment of the new school is in stark contrast to the previous one: "I think it's a good environment, and it's nothing like my previous class, for example, which was very different." The reception and hospitality extended by the class and, more broadly, by the school community, are therefore fundamental to the formation of friendships and, consequently, to the inclusion of the newcomer into school life.

Tensions, Dilemmas, Anxieties

We understand that inclusion is not a state of being that can be taken for granted; rather, it is something that is gradually and unevenly constructed. We have also seen that the pathways young people follow in responding to the arrival of the new are multiple and yield uncertain outcomes: inclusion is a daily exercise in plural compositions and rhythms. There is no stable reference framework, nor a predefined set of rules or codes, whose observance guarantees the successful inclusion of foreign students into school environments. It is not surprising, then, that the arrival and continued presence of newcomers in schools are accompanied by moments of tension and anxiety, the easing of which often requires navigating dilemmas.

Let us look at a few cases reported by the interviewees. In reviewing some of the difficulties felt and identified by foreign students upon their arrival at school, there are moments in which tension becomes explicit and intensifies. One such case was reported by Igor, referring to a comment he overheard, not directed at him, but at another foreign classmate:

Once I overheard something, and it really upset me, in a way. It was when a friend of mine... he's Black. He went to get a second serving in the cafeteria. [...]. And he heard someone say, "he went for seconds because in Africa they can't do that".

Along these lines, Kizua also says he has experienced prejudice firsthand due to the color of his skin: "many people think that Black people steal. If something goes missing, 'oh, he's the one who took it.' [...] Once, in class, a girl's phone went missing and she was already accusing me indirectly." Both the comment made in the cafeteria and the accusation of theft constitute (un)founded judgments based solely on the students' appearance, generating discomfort for those targeted and a tension that is difficult to resolve. Jaswinder¹⁴, an Indian student, recounts a similar case:

Once, a classmate didn't want to sit next to me, even though the teacher told her to. The teacher insisted, but she refused. Some classmates say we smell bad. I don't know why that girl didn't want to sit next to me. I don't think I smell bad.

The student does not know the reason for the classmate's refusal to sit next to him, even after the teacher's prompting. However, based

on comments he has heard, he suspects it may be related to body odor. He is clearly affected by the classmate's attitude, which is rooted in a sensory register, namely, the sense of smell.

Natula says she feels bad during Physical Education classes. Why? Because when it comes to selecting teams for exercises, "they [the classmates] always choose each other. I'm always the last one. [...] I just go to any group." She insists: "if you're feeling sad, no one comes to you. They just leave you. They choose each other because they've been friends for longer." The young student feels excluded, as she perceives that none of her classmates is interested in (or pleased to) have her on their team. She makes a critical observation: "they should at least feel a duty, if a classmate is sad, to talk, to find out what's going on." Natula sees her peers as insensitive to her emotional state, believing that a classmate's discomfort (her own) should take precedence over team preferences in sports activities. Yet her peers make no adjustment to their usual behavior, placing her in a situation of discomfort. More often, it is the newcomers who adapt their behavior in an attempt to ease tensions and enable social interaction. It is the same Natula who tells us: "when I'm doing a presentation, there are classmates who turn their heads [...], some who laugh." So she adjusts her behavior to avoid ridicule, minimizing her exposure in class: "that's why sometimes I don't ask questions. Sometimes I don't ask because I'd have to put myself out there." Similarly, Roberta, who says she felt "obliged to speak [European] Portuguese" by teachers and school staff, adapts her behavior to avoid comments: "I don't make eye contact with people, and I don't talk to them, because I'm ashamed. Even though I really wanted to make lots of friends and everything."

Another tension reported concerns the use of mobile phones. As Martim points out:

I don't think there should be such a big concern about whether I can use my phone or not. Sometimes I'm in Portuguese class using my phone because I need help. The teacher might not want that, but sometimes it's useful. So they don't need to be so strict about these things.

The student uses his mobile phone to clarify language-related doubts, in other words, for educational purposes. However, classroom rules prohibit such practices. According to Martim, the teacher in question does not appear to be sufficiently sensitive to the specificity of his situation, as she applies rules that are general and impersonal, thereby hindering his learning. Tuqeer's case is similar, as illustrated here:

In every class I share a desk with Vichitra. I'm from Pakistan and Vichitra is from India, but we speak the same language. Vichitra also speaks Portuguese. He helps me in class, but the teachers sometimes scold us because we're talking and disrupting the lesson

The dilemma is clear: either conversation is allowed so that the student can understand the content being taught, or general rules are enforced in order to ensure fairness and maintain a smooth classroom environment, at the cost of Tuqeer's comprehension. According to the student, teachers tend to choose the latter, which leads him to adjust his behavior, pretending to understand when, in fact, he does not: "it's

impolite to keep asking people to repeat themselves. So, many times, I pretend I understand, but actually, I don't know what they mean."

Customs brought from students' countries of origin can also lead to conflict during class. Let us hear from Tuqeer again:

In Pakistan, girls don't get up to go to the board. My sister felt very embarrassed when a teacher called her to the board, and she said she didn't want to go. The teacher probably didn't understand that she was feeling ashamed, because girls aren't supposed to be exposed like that in front of the class, standing next to the teacher.

To resolve this unexpected classroom disruption, multiple layers of relevance must be considered. On the one hand, in Portugal, students, regardless of gender, are expected to follow the teacher's directive to go to the board. On the other hand, in the student's country of origin, girls are not supposed to expose themselves in front of the class, so the teacher's request caused embarrassment and "shame." Inclusion is, therefore, always subject to the contingencies presented by each concrete situation, and it is not always easy to carry out action accordingly.

While it is true that these situations do not always have a happy ending, there are times when they do. We conclude, therefore, with one such case, also shared by Tuqeer: "I used to attend afternoon prayer with the rest of the Muslim community in the city, so I had to miss some classes, and the teachers would mark me absent." The class schedule and the timing of religious prayers were in conflict, and the student, not being omnipresent, ended up missing some lessons, thus compromising his academic performance. However,

The homeroom teacher, who is very kind, asked why I was missing classes. I explained the situation, and then he said he would solve the problem. He spoke with the school principal, and she said I could do my prayers in the classroom during the breaks between classes.

Through the intervention of the homeroom teacher, it was possible to make the rules more flexible without, at the same time, disrupting the regular functioning of the classes or the student's religious practices. It is worth noting that this hospitable approach, by taking the specific nature of the case into account, made it possible to safeguard the learning of all students in the class, including Tuqeer. "Maybe it was the first time I truly felt integrated at school, because the homeroom teacher and the school principal understood my religious obligations and helped me fulfill them without having to miss class." However, the tension still lingers: "despite that, my classmates weren't as understanding." Hospitality and inclusion remain a continuous and unfinished exercise.

Concluding Remarks

Based on the interviews conducted with foreign students enrolled – whether recently or for some time – in Portuguese schools, a topic all the more relevant in light of the recent rise in immigration to Portugal, we examined the ways in which the new and the unfamiliar are accom-

modated during the coordination of collective action. What we observed is that inclusion, rather than being a definitive and guaranteed state (or not), is the more or less precarious, more or less consistent outcome of behavioral adjustments and readjustments carried out in specific situations and in response to concrete challenges and problems. Being and feeling included at school does not result from adhering to a set of fixed, predefined rules, nor from internalizing and following a series of stable normative references that would guide joint action. On the contrary, inclusion is a *continuum* whose variation depends on the degree and nature of participation by foreign students in the organization and fabric of the school common.

As we have observed, the arrival of the foreign student at school introduces (and often intensifies) the unexpected and the unpredictable into already established modes of action, requiring situated adjustments and readjustments in order to create an environment accessible and livable for all. We outlined some of the difficulties faced by newcomers: challenges in keeping up with the learning process and achieving satisfactory academic performance, difficulties in communication due to linguistic differences, and (equally important) difficulties in integrating into friendship circles. Overcoming these forms of resistance depends not only on the existence of hospitable infrastructures, but also on the openness, availability, and sensitivity of teachers and staff. Nevertheless, the focus of this text has primarily been on the importance of establishing affinities and friendships, ties that often rely on practices that are fundamentally bodily, sensory, and affective in nature.

Indeed, school is viewed not only as a place for learning and teaching, but also as a space for interaction and socialization. Thus, we have seen how essential the welcoming attitude of the class and of schoolmates more generally, can be. Their hospitable practices toward those who arrive and intend to remain in spaces that may initially feel inhospitable allow for the overcoming of the inevitable tensions triggered by the emergence of difference and novelty. These tensions can be potentially harmful for foreign students, as we have noted, giving rise to feelings of discomfort, unease, sadness, and apprehension. Furthermore, such moments of tension are often accompanied by dilemmas in the coordination of joint action between those already well-adjusted to a familiar environment and those for whom the space remains (still) unfamiliar. However, the resolution of these dilemmas and the alleviation of the anxiety experienced is not ensured by any predefined set of guiding principles. It is therefore up to the students (as well as teachers and school staff) to assess each situation based on its specific contingencies and to adjust their behavior accordingly, ideally, in the most hospitable manner possible. In this ongoing practical exercise, uncertainty is a constant: according to what variable geometries, rhythms, and affects is the school common composed in response to the newcomer? We have followed and presented some illustrative cases, but the question continues to resonate, especially within the empirical terrain itself.

Notes

- ¹ The text is written in European Portuguese.
- ² This article focuses on a research project currently in progress and not funded, entitled “Between School and Neighborhood: Strangeness, Estrangement, and Hospitality.” Fieldwork and interviews conducted (between 2017 and 2018) were carried out in two secondary schools located in the Greater Lisbon area. Six Sociology students participated in this work. It also draws on interviews conducted at a school in Santa-rém as part of a project entitled Measuring the Hospitality of Young Foreigners: Accommodation Devices and Integration Practices in Portuguese Public Schools, coordinated by David Beirante and submitted for funding from the La Caixa Foundation. Across the broader research project, the students interviewed were between 13 and 19 years old, of both genders, and included both Portuguese-speaking and non-Portuguese-speaking participants. The sampling was based on the criterion of nationality, and the interviews were transcribed and subjected to content analysis. Based on the categorization and coding of the interviewees' discourse, the sociological interpretation developed in this article was structured into several analytical dimensions.
- ³ In 2015/16, the proportion of foreign students enrolled across all levels of education in Portugal was 3.6%. Since then, this proportion has increased significantly, reaching a record high in the 2021/22 academic year (the most recent year for which data are available): nearly 9%. Another noteworthy fact is the growing diversity of nationalities represented among these students. While the number of foreign students from PALOP countries (Portuguese-speaking African countries) remains significant, in recent years the percentage of students from Brazilian migration (currently the largest group) and from other non-Portuguese-speaking regions of the world has grown exponentially. (Sources: Directorate-General for Education and Science Statistics and National Education Council)
- ⁴ Female student of Brazilian nationality attending the 11th grade. The given names mentioned throughout the text are fictitious and were assigned to ensure the anonymity of the participants.
- ⁵ Male student of Angolan nationality, 15 years old, attending the 10th grade.
- ⁶ Male student of Brazilian nationality, 17 years old.
- ⁷ Male student of Pakistani nationality, 14 years old, attending the 8th grade.
- ⁸ Female student of Iranian nationality, 17 years old, attending the 9th grade.
- ⁹ Female student of Brazilian nationality, 19 years old.
- ¹⁰ Male student of Indian nationality, 17 years old, attending the 9th grade.
- ¹¹ Male student of Pakistani nationality, 13 years old, attending the 8th grade.
- ¹² Male student of Portuguese nationality, with paternal Chinese ancestry, 17 years old, attending the 12th grade.
- ¹³ Male student of Moldovan nationality, attending the 11th grade.
- ¹⁴ Male student of Indian nationality, 16 years old, attending the 11th grade.

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