

Fernando Luís Gameiro, *Portuguese Secondary Schools: Places of Education and Networks of Complicity. Alentejo Elites' Progress through School and Professional Career, Development 1841–1960*, Major Paper presenting at I Research Design Course, European Graduate School for training in Economic and Social Historical Research - University of Nijmegen, Netherlands, 9-14 November, 1999

## SUMMARY

Recent research in the field of the literacy development in Portugal has established that the literacy rate rose during the period from 1850 to 1880 for the country as a whole. The number of illiterates fell from 82.4% in 1878 to 72.2% in 1890 and this figure dropped slightly in 1900 to 78.6%.

This trend can also be seen in the south of the country: it has been shown that there was also a slow rise in the general level of literacy in the Historical Region of the Alentejo, although this occurred somewhat later than the general trend. With the coming of the 20th Century there began the trend towards the divergence of literacy rates in the Alentejo from those of the country as a whole. A greater level of investment in education did not produce, at the regional level, the kind of impact which was seen at the national level.

In order to achieve literacy rates similar to those of the country as a whole, the drive to widen access to schooling would have had to be accelerated in the region above the level existing in Portugal between 1880 and 1910.

It is within this framework of widespread illiteracy that the importance of the literacy of the groups which uninterruptedly occupied principal local government offices emerges. Its presence is strengthened by the retention of economic power, which these people already possessed, and by the social prestige which the holding of administrative office conferred on them.

Above and beyond these three aspects – literacy, and the economic and the social – what is conspicuous is the constitution of a cohesive and restricted group of local notables which, due to its features and form of behaviour, constitutes an elite group. The degree of cohesion existing among the members of Alentejo economic elites is the key element required for an understanding of the political actuation of local notables; at the same time the level of formal education became an increasingly important feature of identity.

In the Alentejo of the 19th Century landowners saw in academic education a means of promotion for their children and the means for them to encounter a suitable marriage partner (José Cutileiro, 1977).

The cohesion existing among those within the Évora economic elite of the 19th Century who paid the most tax in the district (*concelho*), a result of family ties, was also produced by marriage strategies used not only by those who paid the most tax in the second half of the century but also by their ancestors (Helder Fonseca, 1992).

As regards restricted sociability platforms, educational qualifications constituted one of the requirements for entry to clubs which were reserved for the

local elite, where the practice of reading presupposed the existence of basic educational training (Maria Ana Bernardo, 1992).

Historical studies have shown that the level of formal education possessed by the Évora economic elite in the 19th Century was approximated the level of that of groups of notables at the national level.

The situation at the beginning of the 19th Century placed in context, there is a need for examining the transformations which occurred throughout the 20th Century. The thesis that formal education is basically the story of the permeation of an elitist model throughout society, which diffuses from the top to the bottom of a cultural model, will be tested throughout this process of investigation in order to gauge the implications caused by the widening of access to the masses of secondary education which, up until the 1930s was mainly the preserve of the children of local elites (Fraçois Furet and Jacques Ozouf, 1977, and Rui Ramos, 1988).

Portuguese *liceu* secondary schools, introduced in 1836 by Passos Manuel, were created as part of a programme aimed at the centralisation of education, the secularisation of social life and the uniformisation of pedagogical practice.

But their impact was limited; a humanistic-type education prepared pupils drawn from a restricted elite for university entrance. Recently some historians have expressed the opinion that throughout the 19th Century *liceu* education was the kind of education that those destined to exercise political and administrative power needed (Alain Guillemin, 1972, and Helder Fonseca, 1996). In the 1920s and 1930s a measure of change began to be felt: increasingly *liceu* education became the vehicle for entrance to the middle echelons of public administration, and pupils did not go on to university.

These aspects of the *liceu* education system in Portugal have already been the object of some studies, the majority of which are monographs or reference works dealing with the history of education in general; others deal with the institutional or ideological development of *liceus*. Recent important research has focussed on the organisation of *liceus*, and has a strong sociological bias (João Barroso, 1995).

Historical studies have therefore given the importance to the institutional perspective and dimension. Although this trend has recently been modified, as we have seen, it is important and indeed necessary to examine the problem from the point of view of the social dimension of formal education within the framework of the Social History of Elites, integrating the study in regional economic and social dynamics.

One interesting aspect of this study consists of verifying whether, *liceus* not only constituted places for the educational training of the overwhelming majority of elite members, but also places where lasting networks of complicity were formed to be carried on into the professional and political arena during the active life those who made them up; this is what happened in French *lycées*.

An attempt will be made to confer on Alentejo *liceus* the human dimension that they undoubtedly had, as places where restricted groups of educational actors operated: the teachers - a substantial proportion of local intellectuals; and the

pupils - the children of elites before access to education was extended to the masses in the 1940s.

The plan for this dissertation covers two basic topics:

1. The social origin of pupils attending Alentejo *liceus* in the 19th and 20th Centuries, based on pupils who during the period under study attended the *liceus* of Évora and Beja. Their social origins will be dealt with, as well as their academic progress through school, the network of social relations which they formed a part of, professional career development, political career development, sociability platforms frequented, the possible maintenance of a lasting web of social relations within the framework of the group to which they belonged as *liceu* pupils, and the possible relationship between this web of relations and individual political and professional careers.
2. Emphasis will also be given to a sociological perspective, and an attempt will be made to trace the sociological profile of the teachers, with a view to detecting the existence of possible changes in their behaviour and social insertion throughout the period examined. Their literary production, levels of public intervention, and tendency to frequent common sociability platforms, constitute the main aspects of work which has been undertaken.

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